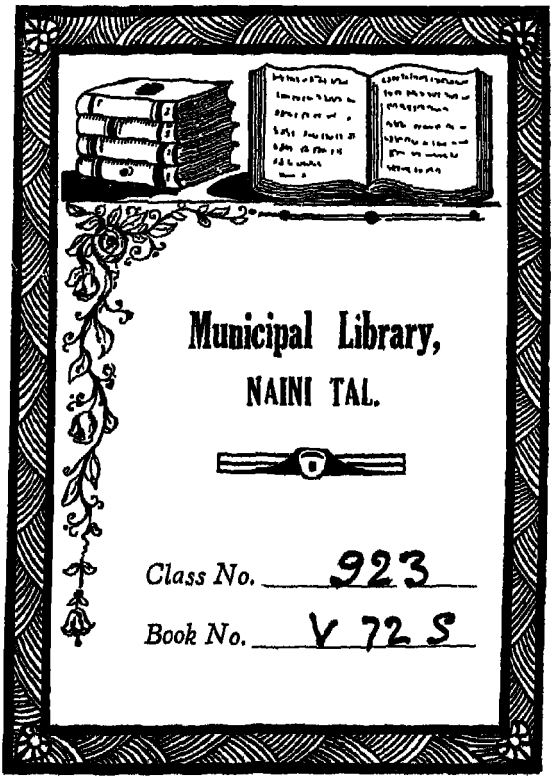

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THE MOTHER OF VICTORIA



THE DUCHESS OF KENT AND PRINCESS VICTORIA
From a picture by Hayter
Rischgitz Studios

DOROTHY MARGARET STUART

THE MOTHER OF VICTORIA

A Period Piece

LONDON
MACMILLAN & CO. LTD
1942

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TO

F. T. H. AND N. M. H.

THAN WHOM NO ONE EVER HAD

TWO BETTER FRIENDS

FOREWORD

So much has already been written about the first half of Queen Victoria's long life that some doubt may be felt as to whether anything more remains to be said. The subject is a fascinating one; but has it not been exhausted at last? I venture to suggest that it has not. Even the brilliant author of *Palace Plays* has not drained dry the dramatic content of the years 1820–40, and the story has not yet been told with chief emphasis upon the Queen's mother. After 1840 the Duchess of Kent recedes into the middle distance, but the whole span of her forty-three years in England affords an amusing cross-section of English social life during a period of transition, and by giving some prominence to *décor* I hope I have justified the sub-title of this book, *A Period Piece*.

No woman placed as the Duchess was, playing the part she did, could fail to be an interesting subject for a biographer. She was the focusing-point of political intrigues during the reign of William IV; her private conduct alienated the affections of her daughter; her public conduct infuriated the Tory party and a large proportion of the Royal Family; if her partisans had had their way, she would have been Princess Regent of England for two years after the accession of Victoria, who would thus have been deprived of the exercise of her sovereign functions at a time when she was perfectly well fitted to undertake them. In addition, the Duchess presents quite a pretty psychological problem of the 'double-personality' order, for before 1829 and after 1840 we look in vain for this arrogant, intransigent

Princess, finding in her stead only, as the Queen wrote later, " the gentlest creature one can ever imagine ".

Little has hitherto been known about the history and private life of Sir John Conroy, her Comptroller, to whom " liberal shepherds " like Greville did not hesitate to " give a grosser name ". I am fortunate enough to be able to provide much hitherto unpublished information about him and his family, and also to give for the first time an authentic portrait of him.

For permission to make use of the papers bequeathed to Balliol College by his grandson, the last baronet, Sir John Conroy, F.R.S., my gratitude is due to the Master and Fellows of the College as legatees and to the Right Reverend Bishop Palmer as surviving Executor. Sir Edward Hanmer, Bart., great-grandson of the first Sir John's daughter Victoire, has most kindly allowed me to reproduce the interesting portrait opposite p. 162. For good counsel and friendly aid I am much in debt to Lord Hylton, Lady Saltoun, Bishop Palmer, Mrs. Henry Cust, Miss Ella Coltman, Miss Edith Drummond, Miss Alicia C. Percival, Mr. Desmond MacCarthy, Miss Gladys Scott-Thomson, Miss Henrietta Tayler, and Mr. Alan Lang Strout. Many sources of information are for the moment barred, but I am grateful, none the less, to those correspondents who have sent me suggestions, and those owners of family papers who would have placed them at my disposal " but for the war ".

D. M. S.

21 Emperor's Gate, S.W.7: 1940
Holt Hatch Cottage, Alton: 1941

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CHAPTER I

PRINCELY NUPTIALS

A state of celibacy is in no respect congenial to a social disposition ; the Duke of Kent found a vacuum even amidst his active duties as a man, a Christian and a philanthropist. He looked around the Protestant Courts of Europe to find a helpmate for him in the person of some amiable and accomplished Princess.

R. MILLER, *Memoirs of his late Royal Highness the Duke of Kent and Strathearn* (1820)

Again do Princely Nuptials grace the sight,
And Albion's Realm around receives delight.

The Gentleman's Magazine, ii (1818)

AT seven o'clock on the morning of June 30, 1818, the *Royal Sovereign* yacht anchored in the Roads, and such inhabitants of Dover as were already astir knew that Edward, Duke of Kent and Strathearn, had brought his bride safely home to England. Four hours later, when the guns on the Castle Hill thundered a salute, large crowds of people had gathered to see the new Duchess disembark. A travelling chariot was drawn up at the water's edge, " by the slip at the North Pier Head ", and as the yacht's barge neared the harbour necks were craned and hats raised. But a disappointment was in store for them ; loyalty and curiosity alike were baulked by the awning over the barge, and by the rapidity with which the Duke hustled his bride into the chariot and gave the word to start.

" She appeared ", wrote *The Times* correspondent, " a tall, genteel figure, and was affable to all by condescendingly

bowing out of the coach-window to the many cheers which greeted her from all ranks in passing."

Public interest in the marriage was lively, not least in those circles where the Duke was regarded as a serious-minded, progressive Prince, whose very merits had made him unpopular in high places. There was also some indignation that financial difficulties not wholly of his own creation should have driven him abroad, while his undeserving eldest brother, the Prince Regent, continued to squander money on such toys as Dutch paintings and gilded domes, and his parsimonious mother showed no disposition to aid him out of her well-filled Privy Purse. The more ingenuous, as well as the more hypocritical, wrote of his union with the widowed Princess Victoria Mary Louisa [1] of Leiningen as if it marked the happy ending of a tale of bachelor solitude. The more cynical, aware of his long, contented liaison with the French-Canadian lady, Madame de St. Laurent, were amused when they watched him playing the bridegroom. There was nothing amateurish in his rendering of the rôle. All the sons of George III had a sense of theatre and loved to hold the centre of the stage ; and a perverse fate for some years kept the fourth of those sons waiting in the wings.

A month had passed since the celebration of his marriage according to Lutheran rites in the Schloss Ehrenburg at Coburg, but as the ritual " did not agree with that of the Church of England ", it was necessary that he should go through a second ceremony, " with an eye to the succession ". It was also necessary that the Duchess, as a possible future Queen Consort, should begin to familiarize herself with the Anglican liturgy — a thing which, in spite of

[1] In contemporary documents and memoirs the name appears indifferently in its German, French, and English forms. When standing godmother in 1819 the Duchess herself favoured ' Victoire Marie Louise ', and she was certainly called ' Victoire ' in her own family ; but in later years she was never described otherwise than as ' Victoria '.

faithful efforts over a space of forty years, she was never able to do.

Many years had passed since the Duke of Kent's rather uneasy tenure of the governorship of Gibraltar had been cheered by the assurances of an old gipsy woman that a child of his would one day be a great Queen, but it seems unlikely that the prophecy recurred often to his mind while he was living quietly with Madame. She had borne him children, those indistinct sons and daughters of whom so little is definitely known, yet whose descendants are to-day honoured citizens of Quebec; he was profoundly attached to her; and the Heiress Presumptive to the throne of England was the warm-blooded, high-spirited Charlotte whose marriage to Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg the Duke himself had helped to bring about. Nothing seemed more improbable than that Charlotte should die young and leave no living child; and even so, there remained the Dukes of York and Clarence, one married to a childless wife, the other not married at all.

As the year 1817 waned the hopes of England were focused upon Claremont, and when both the Princess and her baby died, the nation turned with something like dismay to the unpromising group of uncles upon whom it devolved to continue the royal line. It must have been about this time that Kent began to envisage himself as Edward VII. And for his consort what better choice could he have made than "poor Prince Leopold's sister", as he called her in a letter to Mrs. Fitzherbert. Even the circumstance that his eldest brother viewed the Coburg clan without enthusiasm was auspicious, for the Regent was not popular in those circles to which the Duke had learned to look for support. And now "poor Prince Leopold" was waiting at Claremont to welcome them at the beginning of their English honeymoon.

Delicacy may have deterred the Duke from remarking to his Duchess that they might one day be King and Queen ; but the *Almanach de Gotha* was full of interesting information, and Leopold was never lacking in foresight. Victoria of Leiningen's marriage was largely of his making, and already the Coburg mart had begun those activities which in less than a hundred years were to infuse into almost every dynasty in Europe the pervasive Coburg blood.

Compared with the demonstrations in the bride's own country the reception in England was slightly prosaic. Here no young maidens dressed in white and crowned with roses strewed blossoms before the carriage. Equally marked was the contrast between the mountains and conifers, the Gothic castles (genuine or synthetic) of Coburg and Amorbach, and the comfortable Kentish countryside, with its whitewashed farms and russet oast-houses, and the hop-vines almost ready for picking. But this was the Duke's own duchy ; this was what he loved to call " Old England ", from which he had been exiled so long, first upon military service abroad, and later from lack of funds. Though funds were still low, a grateful nation might confidently be expected to show in the most appropriate manner its sense of his merit : and it is impossible to doubt that His Royal Highness looked about him over his high stock with solemn satisfaction as the royal postillions, in liveries of scarlet and green, drove through the white dust towards Esher.

Of the three Royal Dukes whose marriages were celebrated that summer two — they of Kent and Cambridge — had been fortunate enough to have good-looking wives allotted to them. It is true that Princess Elizabeth, Landgravine of Hesse-Homburg, found her new sister-in-law " neither pretty nor handsome ", only " very pleasing ", when she met the Kents at Calais on their way to England ; but other witnesses tell a different story. Stockmar writes

of the Duchess's good figure, her fine brown eyes and hair, and calls her " altogether most charming and attractive " ; her sister-in-law, Luise, Duchess of Saxe-Coburg, speaks of her as " very beautiful, well-built and vigorous, with a very white skin, black eyes and black hair, and in the highest degree friendly and unaffected ". About this time the *Lady's Monthly Museum* informed its readers that the person of Her Serene Highness was " tall and majestic, with plastic and expressive features ". The bright, almost high colour in her cheeks must have made her resemble the lovely Princess of the Irish legend whose beauty was compounded of ravens' plumes, blood, and snow. With the fine eyes characteristic of her family she had been fortunate enough not to inherit the Coburg nose.

Fifty-three years later her granddaughter, Princess Alice, wrote of one of her children, " Baby's blue eyes are beginning to turn and look almost as if they would be brown. Should dear Grandmamma's and Grandpapa's eyes come up again amongst some of the children, how nice it would be ! " It might well have been expected that the dark colouring introduced into the Family first by Queen Charlotte and then by the Duchess of Kent would modify the Hanoverian blond type a little ; but in the event its influence proved negligible, and it remains true that no King of England since Charles II has had brown eyes.

Another trait mentioned by Stockmar was the Duchess's love of dress. To his provincial German vision the gay schemes she preferred — gayer even than the rather gaudy fashions of the day dictated — were eminently pleasing and correct ; and as the wife of an English Royal Duke, even an impecunious one, it was only fitting that she should wear rich plumes. English ladies were sporting rainbow scarves, pea-green boots, and tartan silk caps that summer. Their bonnets were trimmed with clematis, narcissus, and " the

purple Iberian lily" : their gloves were yellow when they were not green.

The feminine part of the magazine-reading population was assumed by editors to be eager for particulars about the Duchess of Kent. "All classes", observed the *Lady's Monthly Museum*, "take an interest in what concerns their superiors" : and it was soon pretty generally known that "this amiable and truly illustrious Princess" had been born on August 17, 1786, the fourth daughter of Francis Frederic Anthony, Hereditary Prince (afterwards Duke) of Saxe-Saalfeld Coburg, by Augusta Carolina Sophia, daughter of Henry, Count of Reuss-Eberstadt. To *La Belle Assemblée* the public were indebted for the facts that Victoria Mary Louisa was educated "under the immediate care and inspection of her august and well-informed mother", and that "in her single state she lived idolized in the hearts of every inhabitant of Coburg". In touching upon her first marriage — in 1803 — with Emich Charles, Prince of Leiningen-Dachsburg-Hadenburg, most of the chroniclers mentioned that he was then a childless widower, twenty-eight years her senior, who had sought refuge at the Court of Coburg from the advancing armies of Napoleon ; and few of them failed to extol her virtues as a wife and mother. These virtues must have been great, with forbearance and fortitude among them, for her husband was a man of morose temper and caustic wit, "entirely devoted to the amusements of the chase". On his death in 1814 his young widow became guardian of their children, the ten-year-old Charles and the seven-year-old Feodore, and Regent of the pocket-handkerchief principality of which the town of Amorbach, between Hesse and Baden, was the administrative and social centre. In its castle Goethe composed *Hermann und Dorothea*, and in the gardens of its observatory Schiller wrote his *Wallenstein*. It boasted a Benedictine abbey and a ferru-

ginous spring. But during the years of Princess Victoria's regency the whole domain was still scarred by the marching and countermarching, the requisitioning and plundering, of the armies which fought either for or against Napoleon in the last decade of his career. She must have needed all the strength of character inherited from her mother to enable her to cope with her task. This included on one occasion arranging for the burial of the unhappy soldiers lying dead in the fields or by the roadside and menacing the countryside with pestilence. Fortunately for the Regent, her subjects were dutiful. They were grateful, too; when she revisited them twenty years later she was "quite upset" by their demonstrations of loyalty.

This period of her life should not be forgotten when the Duchess of Kent's behaviour during the first part of her second widowhood is considered. She held for five years a position of responsibility and authority, and that she had enjoyed the experience can hardly be doubted; otherwise she would not have sought its renewal on the larger stage of England. A woman of great natural vitality, good-humoured, friendly, untroubled by shyness, she would savour both her public and private duties, her ceremonial appearances among her people, and her private interviews with the officials of her little domain. Indeed, she would appear to have put in some useful practice even before the death of her husband.

Only three years had passed since the battle of Waterloo; Napoleon still dragged out a peevish existence at St. Helena; and English sympathy was easily enlisted for a lady who had suffered so much from his aggressions, as maid, wife, and widow. A more sentimental appeal lay in her relationship to Prince Leopold, who was still popular among those classes who disliked his father-in-law. It is true that some ill-conditioned persons grudged the young widower his

pension of £50,000 a year, supplemented by his pay as a Field Marshal; and there were some who viewed the Coburgers as a clan both pushful and obscure. Yet Princess Julia Henrietta Ulrica of Coburg was married to the Grand Duke Constantine of Russia and Princess Antoinette to Alexander, Duke of Würtemberg. The Duchess of Kent's family connections were at least as respectable as those of the brides selected for the Dukes of Clarence and Cambridge.

Unfortunately it was not then known in England that the name of "Princess Victoire of Saxe-Coburg" had figured on a list of suitable German princesses sent to Napoleon by one of his agents as early as 1802, when the imperial mind first veered towards divorce, for it would have been a piquant idea that an English prince had secured a prize which had eluded the Monster. Reminders were hardly needed of the severity with which the Emperor had afterwards treated the duchy, and it was not difficult to paint as a heroine the indomitable Duchess Augusta who, after the death of her husband in 1806, set off for Warsaw in order to persuade the victor to receive Coburg into the Confederation of the Rhine, only to be halted at Magdeburg by an intimation that she would not be admitted to the Presence. It was not necessary to mention that by the Peace of Tilsit a year later Coburg was "reintegrated", or that Prince Leopold came very near taking service in the French Army. A more tactful recollection was the valiant part played by the Prince fighting in the Russian ranks at Kulm and Leipzig.

There remained yet another claim upon English goodwill — Victoria of Leiningen was, as indeed she had to be, a Protestant Princess. She had grown up under the shadow of the castle where the bed occupied by Martin Luther and the pulpit from which he had preached to the Coburgers were still piously preserved. Nothing was said about her eldest sister, Sophia, who had become a Catholic on her

marriage to a French *émigré*, Count Mensdorff-Pouilly; yet an uneasy doubt concerning the immaculate Protestant coloration of the Coburgs began soon and persisted late.

Royal and distinguished strangers appeared from time to time at Amorbach. In 1813, after the battle of Leipzig, Leopold twice visited his sister, in company with their brother-in-law, the Grand Duke Constantine of Russia, then seeking a reconciliation with his implacable Coburg wife. In 1816, the year of Leopold's marriage to Princess Charlotte, came Edward, Duke of Kent, in "a travelling baroutsch with his valet and one footman on the box". He was planning to live economically at Brussels with Madame de St. Laurent, and at the same time to pay a few visits to friends and connections in Germany. The recently-published diary of the Dowager-Duchess of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld reveals that already in October, 1816 (before the death of Princess Charlotte, and while Madame de St. Laurent still reigned), Kent had marriage with the Princess of Leiningen in view, though not until January, 1818, did she change her mind and accept him.

The story of the Duke of Kent's financial difficulties has been frequently retold, and the obvious comparison with Mr. Micawber almost as frequently made. The first chapter opens at Geneva in 1787, and the last closes at Sidmouth in 1820. He began to lapse into debt when he was twenty, and he continued to flounder and sink until his death at the age of fifty-one. The earnest precision which marked his attitude to military and domestic matters was unaccountably lacking in his money affairs, and his Radical friends, though they rallied round him nobly, could not by their united maximum efforts hope to restore him to solvency. In 1807 his debts had amounted to £200,000, and he resigned half of his total income of £24,000 a year to trustees, that they might pay the interest due on those debts; eight years later

three-fourths of his income had to be set aside. The Duke had no choice but to bid farewell to Castle Hill, Ealing, with all its charms, its lodges in Mr. Wyatt's best manner, its beds ascended by steps upholstered in flowered velvet, its innumerable timepieces, and farewell to the more modest comforts of Kent House, Knightsbridge. Then, with Madame de St. Laurent at his side, he betook himself firmly to Brussels.

Once established there he characteristically began to set his house to rights. It was, he wrote, " though old, thanks to painting, papering, white-washing, carpeting, and putting up a number of stoves, very tolerably comfortable ". It had a flower garden, and " a great deal of fruit on the wall ". " Thus, you see ", he told Mrs. Fitzherbert, " I am living most quietly and I trust contentedly, in the full spirit of my plan of economy and retrenchment." The plan allowed of the building of stables and coach-houses in the English style, as well as domestic reconstructions indoors, where the almost poetical amenities of the plumbing at his Ealing home must have been sadly missed at first.

Quietness and content were rudely shattered by the news of Princess Charlotte's death. The Duke at once realized what might be demanded of him, and with imprudent candour unfolded his views to Mr. Creevey, in an interview too often quoted to be given yet again. Less familiar are his outpourings to Mrs. Fitzherbert at this time. When he thought that his duties to his family and his country might force him to part from his sole comfort and companion of so many dreary years, he had " hardly a dry eye from morning till night ". But he strove to think that an all-wise Providence would direct all eventually for the best.

Obviously the Duke of Clarence, being the elder, would be called upon first, and the Duke of Kent decided to " lay on his oars and wait to see events develop themselves ". He

was not kept waiting long. The expected summons to England came, and the agitating last interview with Madame was got over. "I hope", wrote the Duke, "I shall have the energy to do my duty, but the sacrifice of so much domestic comfort will be dreadful."

Princess Charlotte was said to have desired a marriage between her unknown sister-in-law and the uncle who had always been friendly both to her mother and herself; another rumour declared that old Queen Charlotte had intimated her wishes to the same effect. There was also a powerful argument in the fact that the only other candidate was "that odious Princess Amelia of Baden", twin sister of the Empress of Russia. "But", the Duke had written to Mrs. Fitzherbert, "from her being the only one of six sisters left on hand at the age of 41 and the eldest too, you may judge how little desirable she is." The would-be father of kings not unnaturally renewed his wooing of the personable dark widow who was already — as Lord Liverpool mentioned in announcing the betrothal — "the mother of two remarkably healthy children".

In March 1818 the Duke returned to England, his heart "half broke", but his mind clear as to the course by which duty, interest, and ambition might all be satisfied. Hasty negotiations followed, between Kew, Kensington, and Carlton House, and these in turn led to hurried journeys on the part of Mr. Brook Taylor, British Minister at Würtemberg, who bowled from Munich to Baden and from Baden to Frankfort, consulting the Princess of Leiningen's trustees, the King of Bavaria and the Duke of Baden. On May 6 word was received in London that their consent had been given. No doubt they reflected that even if the Duke of Kent was a poor Prince, England was not a poor country. And, after all, Leopold might set apart some portion of his English pension for the maintenance of his sister and her

husband should Parliament prove unsympathetic. There was even a wild rumour that he had offered to do so.

The Duke's marriage was debated in Parliament with an odd mixture of candour and grandiloquence. Lord Castlereagh suggested to a Committee of the House of Commons that "when a branch of the royal family entered into a matrimonial alliance approved by the Crown and satisfactory to Parliament", the House should be disposed to vote "such a decent and proper additional income as ought to be granted to a member of the royal family under such circumstances, and not to expect that he could meet his expenses with the same means when married as when single". Considering that "he" was the Duke of Kent, who had never "when single" come anywhere near meeting his expenses, the noble lord's choice of words was not happy, and the atmosphere in the House was not uniformly genial. No less than fifty-one members voted against the resolution that the royal bridegroom should receive an additional grant of £6000 a year, and "the same dower to his intended Duchess, in the event of her surviving him". Lord Castlereagh mentioned that by relinquishing the guardianship of her children by her former marriage the Princess would be depriving herself of an income of about £5000 a year, and tried to placate the House by pointing out that in view of the Duke's considerable encumbrances it was not to be expected "that H.R.H. immediately after his marriage . . . would live altogether in that splendid style which he would otherwise do, and which he would adopt as soon as he was liberated from those encumbrances".

In the debate which followed even such members as opposed the grant "in the present circumstances of the country" paid tribute to the "high character of the illustrious Duke", and one of them, Mr. J. C. Curwen, asked in a very pointed manner whether Queen Charlotte were

not in possession of a very considerable sum, derived from the Privy Purse, " out of which Her Majesty could have made good the sums necessary to remove the pecuniary embarrassments " of her fourth son. Sir C. Monck rather quaintly suggested that until it was established that the marriage of the Duke of Clarence would not secure the succession it was not proper that any other member of the royal family should come to the House and ask for an additional allowance " for the same purpose ". There was a pleasing frankness in the language held by honourable members on this occasion, and a company of farmers discussing stockbreeding could hardly have been more matter-of-fact about it all. In the event, Castlereagh's resolution was carried by a majority of 154. Among the ' Noes ' were Lord Althorp, Lord Cranbourne, Sir John Shelley, George Tierney, the Hon. W. Lyttelton, and Sir Matthew White Ridley.

As soon as these preliminaries had been settled, the Duke of Kent, with a promptitude at once chivalrous and soldierly, set off for Schloss Ehrenburg, where his bride had gone to meet him, and where many members of her family had gathered to support her. The keen-eyed, stout-hearted Dowager-Duchess Augusta was there, dominating the group which included her unsatisfactory son, Duke Ernest, and his impetuous little wife Luise of Saxe-Gotha, whose eldest child, an even less satisfactory Ernest, was to be born less than a month later ; Prince Ferdinand and his fair-haired Hungarian bride, *née* Toni Kohàry ; Sophie Mensdorff and her Spanish-looking children ; the lovely young Feodore of Leiningen, in the charge of her Hanoverian governess, Louise Lehzen ; and the devoted Fräulein Spaeth, lady-in-waiting to the future Duchess of Kent.

On May 26 the Duke's courier clattered through the clean, quaint old Thuringian town and under the turreted

gateway of the Schloss, bringing the news that his master would follow two hours later. The family had just sat down to midday dinner, but the table was hastily cleared away, and, says the Dowager, they waited " with anxious curiosity, and poor Victoria with a throbbing heart ; she had seen him only once before ". At four o'clock His Royal Highness arrived, attended by Mr. Brook Taylor, Mr. Knatchbull, Mr. Barnard, and Lieut.-Colonel Bessel Harvey of the 1st Regiment of Foot. " Man of the world though he be," wrote the Dowager, " Kent was a little embarrassed at suddenly breaking in on our large family circle." His mother-in-law, made anxious by the bride's lack of anxiety as to what lay before her, scanned him keenly with her intense blue eyes and noted in her diary : " He is a fine man for his age, with a very engaging, friendly countenance, and a very attractive expression of good humour about the mouth. There is something noble about his tall figure, and the blending of soldierly simplicity and downrightness with worldly good breeding makes his society very pleasant." She does not mention that the Duke had a receding double chin, or that the top of his head was quite bald. A clerical admirer attributed this baldness to " the effects of foreign service ", and added reassuringly that it " by no means derogated from the dignity of his person ". What little hair he had was, like the curling bunches of whisker before either ear, dyed a dark brown.

Stockmar noted in his memoirs that Kent's manner was " intentionally courteous and engaging ", and the adverb is significant. The top-dressing of bluffness did not deceive so shrewd an observer, for he adds that " the play of his countenance betrayed calculation ". Not for nothing had the Princesses his sisters nicknamed him " Joseph Surface ".

With George III's impressive height his fourth son had inherited his immense volubility. Words poured from the

Duke in floods, piled themselves up, and bore all before them. As President or Chairman of numerous charity dinners and philanthropic meetings he had acquired a pompous facility of diction which overflowed into his private conversation. His studied soldierliness did not impose either laconicism or emotional restraint. Certain topics moved him to the depths, especially any reference to the father who in his lucid years had shown so little reciprocal feeling. One of his Dissenting friends " often saw the unbidden tear steal down his noble and manly countenance when allusion has been made to his most excellent parent ". So portentous a solemnity marks all the Duke's written and recorded words that it is with surprise that we gather from a chance remark of one of his sisters that he possessed a knack of mimicry : it was a family trait, which he shared with George IV and Princess Sophia, and transmitted to his daughter Queen Victoria and his grandson King Edward VII. At Coburg gravity and affability would be the order of the day.

In spite of the depredations of the Napoleonic wars the Schloss Ehrenburg was far from being bleak within. It had pillars of marble, doors of polished marqueterie (a local craft), white carpets blushing with roses, bronze furniture, and salons hung with draperies of pink, green, and gold. The great hall, called the Hall of the Giants, had a richly painted ceiling, and its walls were gay with the emblazoned shields of the Saxe-Coburg line. Through the windows could be seen the blue Thuringian mountains and the forests of ancient oak-trees in full summer leaf. Altogether an appropriate setting for a royal wedding.

On May 28 the formal betrothal of Edward, Duke of Kent, and " Victoria Maria Luise " of Coburg took place, and two days later they were married at half-past nine in the evening. Duchess Augusta recorded in her diary how the

family assembled first in the yellow-and-white state drawing-room, whence Duke Ernest conducted his sister to the brilliantly illuminated Hall of the Giants. Beneath a velvet canopy the bridegroom stood waiting, an imposing figure in the full-dress uniform of a Field-Marshal, with exaggerated epaulettes and incredible cocked hat. "Victoire", wrote her mother, "looked most attractive in a dress of white silk lace trimmed with white roses and orange blossom" — raiment suggestive of youth and virginity rather than matronly maturity. "In a very pleasant flutter", adds the old Duchess, "and full of trust in God, I knelt in prayer before His throne for my dear child, for whom this step is the beginning of an entirely new existence. May she, this angelically good and pure woman, find in her second marriage the happiness which was not hers in the first, and may God's best blessings follow her!"

The loudest peal of ordnance of which the fortress guns were capable announced that the ceremony was over, and the company adjourned to the state drawing-room for a *Prunk-Souper* which lasted far into the night. Four days later the bride and bridegroom set off for England, Feodore being left behind for the moment in the care of Lehzen, while Spaeth travelled with the Duchess.

The year 1818 was spangled with royal weddings. On April 7 Princess Elizabeth, buxom and radiant, had been married to the unprepossessing Landgrave of Hesse-Homburg at the Queen's House (now Buckingham Palace); on June 1 Adolphus, Duke of Cambridge, and the well-favoured Augusta of Hesse-Cassel were united there according to the Anglican rite, having gone through the Lutheran ceremony at Cassel about a fortnight before; on June 2 Edward, Duke of Kent, and his bride were on their way to their own English wedding; and by the beginning of July William, Duke of Clarence, was expecting his quiet, homely

fiancée, Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen, in London. Meanwhile the old Queen had moved to Kew, where preparations were going forward for one of the most momentous double bridals in history.

Sycophants, clerical and lay, were quick off the mark with congratulatory verse. The stream of threnodies for Princess Charlotte had not quite ceased to flow when equally effusive wedding odes began to gush forth. Typical of these was one written by the Rector of Teversal and published — no doubt to the reverend gentleman's delight — in *The Gentleman's Magazine :*

> Again do Princely Nuptials greet the sight,
> And Albion's realm around receives delight :
> The Royal Dukes now take a blooming Bride.
> May choicest Blessings o'er each Pair preside,
> May joys supreme long on their union shine,
> And Kings spring from the great illustrious Line !

On June 11 the Duke and Duchess of Kent reached Frankfort ; on the 23rd they were in Brussels, where memories of Madame de St. Laurent can hardly have failed to stir in the mind of her companion of twenty-four chequered years. And now, on June 30, they were safe in England, driving through the friendly English countryside to Claremont :

> On, on, through meadows managed like a garden,
> A paradise of hops and high production.

The courts and castles with which the Duchess had so far been familiar were either of the Frenchified type, evolved in feeble imitation of Versailles, or of the German-Gothic type, heavily baronial. There was nothing at Claremont to remind her of anything she had yet seen ; nor was there anything in the surrounding pleasaunce to recall either Coburg or Amorbach. The estate of some 1500 acres, with rich timber and undulating parkland, had been acquired in

the reign of Queen Anne by Sir John Vanbrugh, who built himself a small brick house. Upon his death, the Earl of Clare, afterwards Duke of Newcastle, bought the property, pulled down the modest mansion, and erected a "castellated prospect-house" to which he gave the name of Claremont. There, amid gardens laid out by the celebrated William Kent, the "aspen Duke", as Horace Walpole called him, lived in deep dejection after his eclipse by Bute; and there, in 1768, he died. The widowed Duchess sold the house and estate to a purchaser well able to pay a good price — Lord Clive, whose coat of arms is still to be seen over the Corinthian portico of the mansion which Lancelot (Capability) Brown built for him, the "castellated prospect-house" having been duly demolished.

His Majesty's Commissioners of Woods and Forests bought Claremont as a home for Princess Charlotte on her marriage to Prince Leopold in 1816, and paid £66,000 for it. It was there that the two passed that year-long honeymoon which ended only with Charlotte's death in November 1817, and there that Leopold spent most of the ensuing year. When the Kents came — and for long after — the young Princess's bonnet and shawl were still hanging on the screen in her sitting-room where she had left them on her return from her last walk. The room in which she died adjoined the breakfast-room, and nothing in it had been altered. If the Duchess of Kent had been a superstitious woman all these reminders of disaster might have cast a shadow over the threshold of her married life in England, when she had to climb and descend every day that curving flight of steps, flanked by columns of scagliola marble, down which the two crimson-covered coffins, the large studded with golden nails and the small with silver, had been borne less than two years before. Matter-of-fact though she was, she may well have been glad three or four months later when she realized

that her child by Kent had been conceived at Kensington and not at Claremont.

On July 2, the morrow of their installation in Prince Leopold's house, the Duke and Duchess drove up to Carlton House in a carriage-and-four, to be formally introduced to the Prince Regent, with whom were the Dukes of York and Cambridge, with their respective Duchesses, and Princess Mary, Duchess of Gloucester. Prince Leopold came separately, in order to support his sister, and his black raiment and pale, aquiline face must have made his a conspicuous figure among the portly, rubicund, and cheerfully-clad Royal Dukes.

If Claremont had seemed unimposing, Carlton House must have made ample amends. No one saw for the first time without some emotion its columns of porphyry, sienna marble, scagliola and verd-antique, with capitals of silver, gilt, or bronze; its ceilings painted to represent summer skies chequered with pale clouds; its Chinese chimney-pieces, its ormolu reliefs of Romans and Sabines, its walls panelled now with rose satin and now with sapphire velvet. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this architectural monstrosity was the "Gothick conservatory", described as "a cathedral upon a small scale", the interstices of the stucco fan-tracery being filled with glass. At one end canopied niches, with royal and allegorical images in the best Strawberry Hill manner, surmounted an entrance of truly 'Gothick gloom'. Outside, against a background not in the least reminiscent of the Thüringerwald, gorgeous peacocks minced to and fro upon a well-shaven lawn.

The magnetic centre of all this magnificence was the man who had called it into being. George, Prince Regent, was then only fifty-six years of age, but his unwieldly figure, and the havoc wrought upon his once admirable features by dissipation, worry, and gout made him appear considerably

older. Traces of his early good looks were still visible, and that they might remain visible a little longer the perruquier, the dentist, and the staymaker worked together. The ravaged face was surmounted by that kind of curling nut-brown wig affectionately known — in honour of the royal wearer — as a Brown George; artfully constructed dentures, held in position by spirals of gold, kept the lips from falling in. Creevey's cruel remarks about "Prinney" abandoning the unequal struggle to hold his "belly" within bounds are often quoted; but if the evidence of Lawrence's full-length portrait at Hertford House (the Turveydrop portrait) is to be believed, that abandonment only marked an armistice, and the fight was afterwards renewed. Even now he was the handsomest of the three brothers present. He had an air. We can well believe that the newspaper report was correct which said that he had received the Duchess of Kent "most graciously":

For he koude of that art the oldé dance.

The absence of the Heir Presumptive to the throne, Frederick, Duke of York, on this occasion might have been interpreted as a slight, but his presence hardly tended to make the atmosphere more genial. He disliked the Duke of Kent, whom he suspected, not without good cause, of having helped to explode the Mary Ann Clarke scandal in order to supplant him as Commander-in-Chief; Kent, on his side, believed York to have been behind what he never ceased to consider his unwarranted recall from Gibraltar, and there were other jars between them. On one occasion at Windsor their quarrel had flared up in the presence of the delicate Princess Sophia, who was immediately "taken with one of her worst spasms".

The Duke of Kent's speech in the House of Lords, declaring that he was fully persuaded the charges against the

Duke of York in connection with the Clarke affair were false, did little to placate the usually good-humoured elder brother, and their reconciliation in 1810 was perfunctory and unreal. Yet here the Duke of York was, bulky and bucolic, with his odd, untidy Prussian Duchess, to join in the welcome to the Family's newest recruit.

Any regret felt by the Duke at the childlessness of his own marriage would be sensibly heightened by the reflection that should the ex-Princess of Leiningen again prove fruitful, he, King Frederick I, might ultimately be succeeded on the throne by a son of " Joseph Surface ". *Absit omen.* That could happen only if William, Duke of Clarence, dropped out of the running. No doubt the elder brother trusted piously that in due course Princess Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen would equal Dorothy Jordan's score — five sons and as many daughters.

A different note was struck by the appearance of Adolphus, Duke of Cambridge, who, partly on account of his amiable character, and partly because of his prolonged absences from his native land, had escaped entanglement in these fraternal brawls. His tall, comely person, surmounted by a luxuriant blond wig, made a good pendant to the beplumed grace of his youthful Duchess.

Of the five surviving Princesses of the Royal House two were now in Germany, Princess Augusta was with the old Queen at Kew, and Princess Sophia, once the Duke of Kent's " little favourite Sophy ", was at Windsor ; so only Princess Mary, Duchess of Gloucester, was present to support the Regent. This Princess's grace was already proverbial, and nobody better than she could have played the part allotted to her. By some miracle of tact all the daughters of George III usually contrived to remain on good terms with all his sons — with the intermittent and inevitable exception of Ernest, Duke of Cumberland.

Relations between the Duke of Kent and the Prince Regent, never very cordial, were at this time distinctly stiff; nor were they made easier by the fact that the Duke, once a frequenter of the disreputable Court of Caroline, Princess of Wales, was still on his old affectionate terms with the long-suffering Mrs. Fitzherbert. Prinney must have regarded with anything but favour the friend of *both* his alienated wives, the official and the unofficial. Nor was he swayed by any grateful recollections of the manner in which his brother had supported his interests in Parliament during the Regency debates of December 1810. Himself an amusing hypocrite, he regarded Kent as a dull humbug.

To the Duchess of Kent this large, gracious personage was a man who had treated his daughter badly, and his daughter's husband no better. She would not forget the pathetic appeal of Charlotte's portrait hanging in the house of the old Duchess at Coburg. Prince Leopold's dislike of Charlotte's father was rooted in various causes, personal, political, and domestic, but it was rooted too deep not to have communicated itself to the rest of his clan. "The Regent", considered Leopold, "was not kind to his brother." To the warm-hearted Duchess, already charmed by the chivalrous attentions of her English husband, that was condemnation enough. The ghost of Charlotte haunted Coburg as well as Claremont, and the more sentimental the Duchess felt about her, the less responsive would she be to the Regent's powers of fascination. "She was naturally", said Stockmar, "truthful, affectionate and friendly, unselfish, full of sympathy and generous"; and though her feelings towards Leopold were to cool later, she was at this time warmly attached to him. Nor did she forget what she owed to him. His letters, as well as the Duke's, written during the marriage negotiations, were carefully preserved by her, and were found among her papers after her death.



QUEEN CHARLOTTE AT BATH
From 'La Belle Assemblee', 1818

In the light of later events it does not seem that the Regent took very kindly to "Edward's wife", though whether he felt immediate personal antagonism towards her or was influenced by his dislike of the Duke of Kent it is difficult to say. The Sisterhood, however, proved more responsive, and those who were in England at the time of the marriage conveyed to the eldest of them all, the Dowager Queen of Würtemberg, the reassuring intelligence that the Duchess was "very good humoured and pleasant".

There remained the most alarming introduction of all — the introduction to Queen Charlotte.

The little old Queen had been failing for some time, and to everyone but herself it was clear that this would be the last summer of her life. Early in the year she had still had sufficient physical strength to walk in the gardens at Kew with her wonted brisk step, and sufficient optimism to persuade herself that the attacks of breathlessness from which she suffered were caused by the tightness of her dress; but as the days passed her discomforts grew, and only her indomitable will remained unweakened. In a passion of pity her daughters Augusta and Mary watched her waging her rearguard fight with death. Elizabeth, the third Princess, whose insistence in the matter of her marriage with the Landgrave of Hesse-Homburg had stirred the royal temper into its last blaze, sailed away with her uncouth bridegroom on June 27, but Augusta was free to devote herself to her mother, and the Duke of Gloucester had solemnly withdrawn to the Continent so that his wife should be able to share her sister's burden without giving rise to a rumour that she had separated from him.

For all the Family, but more especially for the Queen, Kew was a place of many memories. It was she who had acquired not only the now-vanished White House, but also the old red-brick building known successively as the Dairy

must have looked dumpier and more jovial than ever. And his wife, the thin, plain, rather spinsterish Adelaide must have been completely eclipsed by the buxom Victoria in her wedding-dress of gold tissue lined with white satin and trimmed with Brussels point lace.

Many of the guests had been present at the very different wedding of Leopold and Charlotte, and one of them, Lord Sidmouth, the Home Secretary, had kept vigil at Claremont during the fatal *accouchement*. The Loves and Graces surely scattered rosebuds over Carlton House from the November sky in 1816; but it is difficult to imagine them hovering above Kew in the July sunshine of 1818. None the less, even the most decorous, even the least visionary, of the company at Kew must have speculated as to which couple, if either, would oblige the British nation by providing the necessary heir. It was true that the Duke of Cambridge, a virtuous and vigorous Prince of forty-eight, had already been married for six weeks to the twenty-year-old Augusta of Hesse-Cassel; but his position at the foot of the dynastic ladder meant that any child of his would have the longest climb to reach the top.

The Regent took the head of the table at the wedding dinner which followed, and in the evening a double royal salute was fired by cannon in the Park " in commemoration of the joyful event ". Meanwhile Prince Leopold's travelling carriage, drawn by four fine greys, had borne him, his sister, and his brother-in-law back to Claremont.

The new Duchess could have begun her acquaintance with England in no more delightful spot — nor in more edifying company. Already Leopold's conversation resembled that " highly instructive book " to which his niece Victoria was later to compare it, and Kent was a man capable of improving any occasion to almost any extent.

The Duke's old quarters at Kensington Palace had been

prepared — though at no great cost — to receive him and his bride, and they took up their residence there a few days later. The Duchess's English lessons were begun at once, and included reading aloud little speeches in reply to royal addresses. She also had to familiarize herself with the various philanthropic organizations in which her husband took an active interest. These numbered fifty-three, and it seemed probable that she would sooner or later have to attend an annual meeting of each one of them in his company. Here was a point scored over Madame de St. Laurent, whom British propriety had never permitted to sit beside the Duke on any platform, however earnestly she may have shared His Royal Highness's anxiety that Jews should be converted, artisans encouraged, distressed authors relieved, infant heathens instructed, ruptured persons supplied with trusses, and poor women delivered in their own habitations. Perhaps this was the vacuum to which the author of the posthumous memoir alluded.

Claremont must have seemed lonelier than ever to Prince Leopold when the cheerful presence of his youngest sister was withdrawn, and he was left to the solitary contemplation of the Duke of Newcastle's derelict observatory, the obelisk in memory of Lord Clive, and the rather mournful little temple designed by Princess Charlotte and now known, for some reason hard to fathom, as her mausoleum; but the Kents could tarry there no longer, for they had much to do in town.

CHAPTER II

ENGLISH HONEYMOON

His youth and his manhood with wisdom employ'd,
And valour and prudence conducting his sway,
Far retir'd he still felt in his heart a dull void
Which Louisa supplied on the bright nuptial day.

A Clergyman, late of Oxford

The English Nation at large, ever prone to honour and appreciate Worth and Virtue, cannot fail to experience the most heartfelt gratitude by this auspicious Marriage.

La Belle Assemblée (September 1818)

It was not necessary that any mementoes of Madame de St. Laurent should be removed before the Duke of Kent and his bride took up their abode in his old quarters at Kensington Palace and their English honeymoon began. Kent House, Knightsbridge, and Castle Hill, Ealing, had been his real homes while the long liaison lasted, and he had used his official residence mainly for official purposes. Indeed, so little had he needed the apartments assigned to him that he had been able to offer a suite to the exiled Louis Philippe, a friend of his Canadian days. Now, however, circumstances had altered, and it is difficult to doubt that the Duke, transported beyond the ignorant present, sometimes envisaged the hour when the claims of a young family might justify him in asking for more spacious accommodation. If any regrets clouded his mind as he drove past the deserted nest in Knightsbridge they were probably tempered by that consciousness (peculiarly grateful to a man of his type)

that the call of duty had not found him unready.

The household of the newly-married couple was on a considerably smaller and more unassuming scale than the Claremont household, for Prince Leopold had retained the staff which had been engaged upon his marriage, and while the Kents employed only one cook and no pages, the Prince had three cooks, four pages, and a "coffee-room woman". Lieut.-General F. A. Wetherall, formerly of the N.S. Fencibles, was the Duke's Comptroller; Lieut.-Colonel Bessel Harvey, the same who had accompanied him to Coburg, was still his Private Secretary; and to the group of four equerries who had formed part of his bachelor establishment one had now been added, Captain John Conroy, till lately Adjutant of the Royal Regiment of Artillery.

When John Conroy died thirty-six years later his obituary notices put it on record that he had served with distinction during the Napoleonic wars, but from the Army List it is clear that he fought neither in the Peninsula nor at Waterloo. Mrs. Conroy, *née* Elizabeth Fisher, whom he had married when he was twenty and she seventeen, was born at Government House, Quebec, in the year 1791 — the very year that the Duke of Kent had taken up his duties in Canada. Her father, General Benjamin Fisher, was the brother of that amiable if sycophantic prelate, Bishop Fisher of Salisbury, formerly tutor to the Royal Princes, nicknamed the Kingfisher. The Duke could not fail to be on friendly terms with the relatives of his old preceptor, and it may have been in remembrance of happy days in Canada that he godfathered the eldest son of John and Elizabeth Conroy in 1809. Royal condescension did not end there; and from the year of Kent's marriage may be dated the steady rise of the whole Conroy family.

Once settled at Kensington the Duchess found that instruction was to be mitigated by amusement during her

English honeymoon. Only a woman of magnificent vitality could have stood up to the arduous programme planned by her indefatigable husband, but it was one well designed to school her for her future duties, whether as Duchess or Queen Consort. Her first impressions were curiously chequered, for parties at Carlton House and evenings at the theatre alternated with visits to arsenals and penitentiaries.

Two months later the dying Queen whispered to her daughter, Princess Augusta, "I have caused a dull summer to you all, for the Prince would have given his Brothers balls and parties on account of their marriages and poor I have been a bane to everything". But it was certainly not a dull summer for the Duchess of Kent, and in her remorseful mood the Queen forgot not only that the Regent had given his brothers a party (if not a ball) but that she herself had entertained her daughter-in-law to dinner.

The Carlton House party took place on July 15, and was very magnificent indeed. A detachment of Life Guards and a "numerous assemblage of Bow Street constables" were necessary to regulate the traffic; the courtyard was brilliant with more than its usual complement of lamps; the guard of honour of the 3rd Regiment of Foot was played to its post by its own band. A large crowd watched the arrival of the guests, and once more the physical contrast between the tall, dark Field-Marshal and the short, florid Admiral must have leaped to the eye. The gentle Duchess of Clarence, with her narrow, scorbutic face, can have made but a poor showing against the highly-coloured, animated Duchess of Kent; but the two sisters-in-law were already excellent friends, glad to have opportunities of speaking their common mother-tongue to each other.

After dinner, which was "served up with great splendour", the Hanoverian band of the Coldstream Guards

performed in the Gothic Conservatory, under the mock-medieval images in their niches of fretted stucco.

On the following evening the Kents attended a less distinguished but possibly more amusing entertainment. To do this they had to cross the recently completed Waterloo Bridge, for their destination was the Coburg Theatre, the direct ancestor of the modern "Old Vic". Like their Elizabethan forerunners, some of the theatre-promoters of the early nineteenth century eluded the interference of the Lord Chamberlain by planting themselves on the south bank of the Thames, but with this difference that, while many of the plays first acted on Bankside were immortal, few of the Surrey-side melodramas are now remembered, except *Black-Eyed Susan*. The foundations of the Coburg rested upon stones that had once formed part of the medieval palace of the Savoy, and the interior was designed and decorated by the same clever Frenchman, Cabanelle by name, who constructed the new stage for Drury Lane. Prince Leopold had accepted an invitation to lay the foundation-stone, but when the appointed day came, in October 1817, his young wife was nearing her confinement and the ceremony was performed by proxy.

In July 1818 the Coburg had been open for only a few weeks; its gilding was still gay and its paintwork bright. The drop-scene, representing Claremont, was twice as green-and-white as the original. It was a delicate acknowledgement of its connection with the Coburg family that this obscure *rive-gauche* theatre should have been selected for the Duchess's first honeymoon entertainment.

The programme opened with "a grand new Spanish serio-comic ballet", *Don Quixote ou La Finesse de l'Épée*; next came "an entirely new interesting local [*sic*] melodrama", *The North Pole*. "The scenery", declared the playbill, was of "a most novel and splendid description"; in it

House, then at Clarence House, and finally at Kensington Palace.

In his youth Atkins had been a tide-watcher in the employment of the Customs, and his manners were said to have remained uncouth; but he would be personally more acceptable to the Regent than his immediate predecessor Matthew Wood, "London's twice praetor", Caroline's partisan, Kent's trustee. The Princess of Wales had always a large following east of Temple Bar, and her husband must have needed much self-command to receive with equanimity a body of men among whom so many were her supporters; but Wood's presence would be the greatest trial, for it would remind the Prince at once of his wife's lack of decorum and his brother's lack of cash, both of which the pestilent fellow laid to his charge. However, the thing had to be done, and the princely countenance had to compose itself while the City Remembrancer in sonorous accents read aloud the address congratulating him on the recent marriages of his brothers and hoping that His Royal Highness would "derive much additional felicity from these propitious events".

Rather tactlessly the address went on to emphasize the City's joy in "every occurrence which strengthened their reliance in the preservation and continuance of the inestimable blessings which they enjoyed under the auspicious government of the House of Brunswick". That reliance had been strained by his own failure to beget more than one legitimate child, as the Regent could hardly fail to realize; and he may have been painfully reminded of the fact that even his amours had proved curiously sterile.

From Carlton House the cavalcade — a Rowlandson cartoon in motion — proceeded to Clarence House, St. James's, to congratulate the Duke and Duchess of Clarence; and thence, skirting the high brick wall of Hyde Park, along Knightsbridge, with its huddle of shabby old houses tenanted

by notorious rebels and Radicals, past Kent House, Kingston House, Gore House, where William Wilberforce then lived, through the old, tree-shaded turnpike, the Cinderella coaches, with their red- or blue-gowned occupants, proceeded to Kensington Palace.

Kensington itself was then a quiet suburb, its comfortable houses scattered among pastures and nursery gardens, its serenity broken only where the Great Western road, with its clamour of mail coaches and market carts, ran past the southern foot of Campden Hill. To the west of Palace Green, masked by ancient elm-trees, stood the squat brick building called by Bishop Blomfield the ugliest church in his diocese: and fine old purple-red houses flanked the main road or lost themselves among the boskage of the Hill.

The glittering and jingling line of carriages swung sharply to the right, through the high wrought-iron gates thrown wide to receive them and between the columns topped with the lion and unicorn, and so past the Green and into the courtyard under the clock-tower. Then, after the appropriate interval, the City Fathers were ushered into the presence of the Duke and Duchess, and the Remembrancer unfurled his scroll.

The address to the Duke contained the inevitable fulsome allusion to Prince Leopold, "whose distinguished merit had obtained him a large share in the affection of the people of England". The Duke in reply remarked that it was most flattering to him to perceive that so favourable an opinion was entertained of his illustrious brother-in-law. It was then the turn of the Duchess, who, even if she could not follow without difficulty the rotund periods of the City Remembrancer, would recognize her brother's name, which cropped up almost at once. Copies of both speeches would have been submitted in advance to enable replies to be

prepared, and the Duke no doubt drafted the modest and brief discourse of the Duchess, who, he explained, did not yet read English very well, but would "make the attempt". Her Royal Highness, we are told, then read her answer "very intelligibly" as follows :

> "My Lord Mayor and Gentlemen,
>
> "I have to regret being as yet so little conversant with the English language, which obliges me to say in a very few words that I am most grateful for your congratulations and good wishes, and highly flattered by your allusions to my brother. May I only be as fortunate as he in meriting your attachment."

From July 28 to August 12 the Kents were back at Claremont with Prince Leopold, but they did not remain in seclusion there. On August 3 they went up to town together to enjoy an operatic entertainment called *Free and Easy*, and on August 4, accompanied by their host, they paid a visit of inspection to the headquarters of the British and Foreign School Society in the Borough Road, Southwark.

The founder of the society was a Southwark Quaker, Joseph Lancaster by name, who, when only fourteen years of age, had run away from home with the idea of making his way to Jamaica and "teaching the poor blacks the Word of God". Unlike Mrs. Jellyby, he was not insensitive to the needs of his more immediate neighbours, and in 1796, when not yet eighteen, he started a small school for poor children in a room provided rent-free by his father. Three years later, having gathered pupils about him to the number of a thousand, he found himself sadly hampered by the lack both of assistant teachers and of books. Lancaster thereupon invented what became known as the "monitorial system", by which the elder children taught the younger. Instead of lesson books, he introduced printed sheets pasted

on boards, and round each of these twelve children stood in turn, under the active guidance of a monitor.

News of these doings reached the ears of George III, and Lancaster was summoned to the royal presence. "It is my wish", the King told him, "that every poor child in my kingdom may be taught to read the Bible." Encouraged by these words, the good man launched out upon such an ambitious scale that he soon found himself in financial straits, and a society was founded in 1808 to carry on his work. The unwieldly name of *The Institution for Promoting the British (or Lancastrian) System for the Education of the Labouring and Manufacturing Classes of Society of Every Religious Persuasion*, which it adopted in 1813, was soon shortened to *The British and Foreign School Society*, under which designation it flourished for many years, patronized by royalty and encouraged by serious persons, mostly of the Nonconformist persuasion. Strict Anglicans supported the rival organization, the National Society, launched in 1811 to counterbalance the activities of Lancaster and his friends, and they also, out of loyalty to the S.P.C.K., looked coldly upon the Bible Society, which the Duke supported with fervour. On one occasion at Windsor the Archbishop of Canterbury remarked in a significant tone, "He that is not with us is against us"; to which the Duke retorted, "Your Grace, there is another saying of our Lord: 'He that is not against us is on our side.'" We are told that "the prelate frowned"; but if his eyebrows had risen it would hardly have been surprising. The rebuke was without effect. The Duke of Kent continued to patronize his Dissenting friends, one of whom wrote that he was "particularly liberal in his sentiments, and occasionally for the service of public charities attended chapels not in the Establishment, including the Hanover Chapel", at Peckham. We are irresistibly reminded of the edification which his

daughter, Queen Victoria, received from the ministrations of her Scottish Presbyterian chaplains ; but the resentment of the prelates of " the Establishment " was very natural. In later years one of the few Anglican clergy who did look with favour on the work of the British and Foreign Schools — Dr. Stanley — married Lady Augusta Bruce, who had been a Lady-in-Waiting to the Duchess of Kent.

Although George III in his conversation with Joseph Lancaster spoke of " every poor child ", the Lancastrian schools accepted pupils of any age, and Dickens has given, in *Our Mutual Friend*, a description of one of these mixed academies, where " young women old in the vices of the commonest and worst life were expected to profess themselves enthralled by the good child's book, the Adventures of Little Margery, who resided in the village cottage by the mill ", and " unwieldly young dredgers and mud larks " were regaled with the experiences of Thomas Twopence. What Dickens does not explain is why these unfortunate pupils should have elected to go to school at all ; and if the early promoters of the scheme had read this indictment they might well have retorted that the old-young women and the unwieldly dredgers would be better employed conning these books than soaking themselves in cheap gin and fighting in the fetid alleyways of London.

The Duke of Kent certainly felt no doubts as to the value of the work done by the Society, and he and the Duchess spent two hours inspecting the Borough Road headquarters, where " the system of needlework in the girls' school appeared especially to claim the interest of the Duchess ", who was attended by " Baroness Spaeth and other ladies of distinction ". Alderman and Mrs. Wood figured prominently on the reception committee.

The neighbourhood was not one likely to give foreign visitors a pleasing impression. " If a man wished to abstract

himself from the world, to remove himself from within reach of temptation, to place himself beyond the possibility of any inducement to look out of the window, he should by all means go to Lant Street ", wrote Dickens, in describing Bob Sawyer's lodgings in the Borough. " The population ", he added, was " migratory, usually disappearing on quarter day and generally by night " ; and even the green shutters and brass knockers on the drab little houses can hardly have relieved the monotonous squalor of the scene. But the enthusiasm of the inhabitants would do much to gratify a prince so avid of popularity as the Duke of Kent. No one in the crowd was seen to pull his hat further down over his ears as many people did when the Prince Regent ventured forth.

Followed by plaudits, Prince Leopold's carriage, with the servants like himself still in deep mourning, recrossed the river and clattered over the cobbled streets to the hardly more decorative and equally Pickwickian district of Goswell Street and the City Road, where there was a branch school of the Society. The royal and aldermanic carriages formed something like a procession, and Duke, Prince, and Alderman all being in high favour with the citizens, they must have enjoyed something like a triumphal progress.

The object of this second visit was the presentation of medals to deserving pupils and the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Society's foundation. Eminently earnest and respectable though the greater part of the gathering was, Caroline, Princess of Wales, might well have looked round her there " as if amongst a company of friends ". She would have seen the brother-in-law who had been wont to regale her with gossip about the Family, the Alderman who had been her champion in Parliament and out of it, and the sharp-nosed, pushful, plaid-trousered figure of Henry Brougham, M.P. for Winchelsea, already her advocate and

destined two years later to defend her at her public trial for adultery. Alderman Wood again took the lead in the proceedings — which his experience as Lord Mayor and Member of Parliament qualified him admirably to do. But even he was not more public-meeting-minded than the royal guest, of whose discourse at least the opening passages must have been spoken impromptu.

His Royal Highness began by remarking that though he had not been aware of the importance of the present occasion — the Society's anniversary — he was happy to be present, and he had brought the Duchess with him as he was desirous that she should be made acquainted with the able manner and liberal principles upon which education was conducted in this country. The Regent, reading the rest of that sententious speech, would consider that his fourth brother was running true to form, and would probably perceive that Edward the married man was going to have an even greater success among Radicals and Dissenters than he had had as a nominal bachelor.

The Rev. Dr. Lindsay, replying to the Duke, made an allusion to Prince Leopold which visibly affected him and his sister. "The conduct and sorrows of that Prince", declared the reverend gentleman, "had given him a Throne in every British Bosom"; and he voiced the satisfaction of the company that the Duke had brought with him that day a Princess "animated by similar feelings to co-operate with him". No one mentioned that Mr. Lancaster had broken away from the Society in wrath, and was then an emigrant in America.

It was the custom that the boys who received the medals should each read aloud some passage from the Scriptures, but Alderman Wood moved that as the hour was growing late this part of the agenda might be omitted. The Duke, prompted maybe by recollections of previous prize-givings,

hastily observed that there appeared to be "no reason for making those boys read to whom it was already determined to give the prizes", and the motion was agreed to. The meeting then heard with gratification that a Committee of Ladies had been formed, with the Duchess at its head, and the Duke then rose to ask to be permitted to return thanks on her behalf, "as she was not yet perfectly conversant with the English language, and if she were, her feelings would not permit her to express what she wished on the present occasion". He added that a subscription of £50 would be her first to any charitable institution.

None of the other ladies of the Family had ever sat, or was ever likely to sit, upon a Committee. Their charities were private and personal, and they must have viewed with some surprise the innovation that was now made. The horrid figure of the strong-minded woman, personified in Revolutionary France by Madame de Genlis and Madame de Stael, had reared its head in England when Mary Wollstonecraft had published her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* twenty-seven years before; and the impression still prevailed in many quarters that for a 'female' to associate herself publicly with any movement, however philanthropic, was incompatible with delicacy and good breeding. George III, who had viewed with disfavour the possibility that any of his sons should "intermeddle with public affairs", could hardly have approved. Not until the poor King's final obliteration in 1811–12 did the Duke of Kent embark upon that career of active and vocal philanthropy which absorbed so much of his energy while he was in England; and now having for the first time "a Princess animated by similar feelings to co-operate with him", it was perhaps natural that he should desire this co-operation to be something more than passive. He already knew enough of his Duchess to feel sure that she would never develop a

masculine intellect; and in the event it does not appear that Her Royal Highness ever attended a meeting of the Ladies' Committee.

When the applause following the Duke's little speech died away, Mr. Brougham got up and proceeded to give a political colour to the occasion by attributing to the example of the Society the increasingly enlightened sentiments of the Tsar Alexander I. That example, he said, "was warming and illuminating the dark and foreign regions of the north of Europe; and he who had hitherto reigned over a hundred and forty millions of barbarians now disdained a sceptre unless he could wield it over an educated and civilized population". Madame de Kudener, the Tsar's Egeria, ought certainly to have had a seat on the Ladies' Committee.

Not without reason was the Society called 'British and Foreign'. Branches were set up in Jersey, Paris, Brussels, and various parts of Germany. Only a fortnight before his death the Duke wrote that it was the joint intention of himself and the Duchess to fit up a school for the instruction of all the poor of Amorbach, at their personal expense, "if they could not", he added cautiously, "accomplish it otherwise". He was indeed, as in the same letter he claimed to be, "the constant and zealous friend of the promotion of education among the poor"; but it was not a cause which enlisted much sympathy in high places in the last year of the Regency.

The unfashionable south bank of the Thames would seem to have exerted a sort of magnetic pull upon the Duke of Kent, for only a day after their visit to the Borough he conducted his Duchess "to view the different Government establishments at Woolwich". Four of these, the Arsenal, Gun Factories, Carriage Department, and Laboratory, had borne the prefix of 'Royal' from the time that George III paid his second visit in the year of Trafalgar. No doubt it

was desirable that Her Royal Highness should see something of the arts of war as well as of the arts of peace; but the transition from needlework to cannon-balls was an abrupt one.

Without being a clever woman the Duchess was, what would please the Duke even better, a receptive one. He obviously addressed himself at once to the task of forming her mind, and in the brief score of months which their marriage lasted she had imbibed enough of his philosophy to range herself almost too openly on the side of the Radicals and the Reformers during the years following his death. These, he had made her feel, were her friends; upon them she could rely if Kings and their Cabinets should prove unkind. Himself the almost lifelong prey of something very like persecution mania, he had come to the conclusion that the affection of the masses was equally useful as a prop and as a goad.

All the Royal Dukes, with the unpopular exception of Ernest, Duke of Cumberland, tended politically to the Left, but there was about the Duke of Kent's Radicalism a gloomy tinge very different from the gay blue-and-orange colouring of his younger brother, Augustus, Duke of Sussex. When they went together to inspect the Socialist Robert Owen's symbolic system of cubes, representing the various classes of society, and watched him placing on the top of the pyramid the small cube which stood for the Royal Family and the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, Sussex jogged Kent's elbow and murmured, "Edward, do you see that?" The significance of Mr. Owen's pyramid was not lost on the elder Duke. Take care of the base and the summit will take care of itself was roughly its message. So Kent, in his own way, took care of the base.

No man with so keen an eye to popular favour could fail to exploit the honeymoon theme. Assiduously the Duke

showed himself abroad with his new Duchess, taking her " to visit many of the most respectable institutions and principal manufactures of the metropolis ", and giving her, perhaps unconsciously, an intensive training in the royal technique for such visits. The process was less exhausting after their return on August 12 to Kensington, and even then it seems odd that he should have allowed her so little repose. On August 14 *The Times* announced, on the authority of the *Morning Chronicle*, that the Duke of Clarence had declared his intentions to return with the Duchess from Hanover to England in the course of a few months " as he had the well-grounded prospect of her R.H. bringing him a Prince or a Princess and it was their mutual wish that the birth should take place in England ". Adding a little spitefully that " the same paper seemed to be in luck with its interesting secrets ", *The Times* went on to inform its readers that the Duchess of Cambridge also was *enceinte*. As her husband was Governor of Hanover it seemed unlikely that she would be brought to England for her confinement. There was as yet no interesting secret to disclose concerning the Duchess of Kent.

Three days later the Duchess spent her first English birthday, and was entertained to dinner by her redoubtable mother-in-law. Except for the absence of the Clarences and the Cambridges, the company was very much the same as it had been at the formal reception at Carlton House. The Prince Regent drove out to Kew from London, the Duke and Duchess of York came from Oatlands, and the Duchess of Gloucester was temporarily in residence with Princess Augusta and in attendance on the Queen.

The dinner to which the distinguished company sat down cannot have been a very good one, unless the Regent sent his own chef, the celebrated M. Watier, to prepare it; for Her Majesty's frugal habits were proverbial, and she was

as poor a judge of wine as her royal husband had been. None the less, she was still capable of presiding at table with that grace which in her more amiable moods made her a charming woman. It was about this time that Stockmar described her as " small and crooked, with a true mulatto face " ; his medical acumen ought to have told him that the warped and distended body and the thickened features were symptoms of the severe heart disease from which she was to die three months later. Fortunately on this occasion she did not alarm her companions by one of those ' spasms ' during which her physicians admitted to each other, though not, as yet, to her, that she was in imminent danger of death. And not as yet would she entertain the thought that her days were numbered. To " a drag in the chest " she had to confess, and Sir Henry Halford had privately intimated to the Regent that the state of Her Majesty's *bas ventre* was unsatisfactory ; but now, propped up in her horsehair-covered elbow-chair, facing her eldest son along the polished table, she dominated the assembled Family.

Her two daughters-in-law, the Duchess of York and Kent, were a curiously contrasted pair, the elder ailing, unkempt, eccentric, and no doubt pining to get back to her devoted hordes of dogs at Weybridge, the younger, animated, interested, and in opulent bloom. About a fortnight later the Queen of Würtemberg wrote to Lady Harcourt, " It must be a great pleasure to my brothers that the Queen approves of all their Duchesses, who also suit my sisters ". It must indeed have been ; for the Queen's approval was always sparingly bestowed, and if on this occasion it had been withheld the natural friendliness of the Sisterhood would have been damped down.

To the Regent the Duchess of Kent would not be less appealing because she had so far been the subject of no " interesting announcement ". If he had been divinely

permitted to decide which of his brothers should provide the missing heir, he would probably have chosen Frederick. The death of the Duchess of York might yet enable Frederick to do it. As between Clarence and Cambridge the Prince's vote would sway: but there can be no doubt at all that it would have been recorded against Kent. Therefore it may have been accounted unto the Duchess of Kent for tact, if not for righteousness, that she alone of the three royal brides had not yet given her husband "a well-grounded prospect of bringing him a Prince or a Princess".

In the meanwhile her mind was further enlarged in various directions. Three days after the birthday dinner the Duke conducted her to the warerooms of Messrs. Flight and Robson, "to hear the Apollonicon". This was "a grand musical and mechanical instrument, which by its mechanical powers performed the overtures to *Figaro* and *Der Freischutz* every day from 1 to 4", the price of admission being one shilling. Of this instrument Their Royal Highnesses were pleased to express their highest approbation. Next, according to the principle of alternating pleasure with instruction, a visit was paid — on August 22 — to the General Penitentiary for Convicts at Millbank.

In that vast, cumbersome building "offenders of secondary turpitude" were imprisoned, in accordance with a plan approved by Parliament in 1799, as an alternative to immediate transportation to New South Wales. Jeremy Bentham, in his pamphlet *Panopticon or Inspection House*, laid down the principles upon which the Penitentiary should be conducted, and by 1818 it was in full swing, in spite of earlier opposition from George III, who viewed with a distrustful eye any theory advanced by so revolutionary a thinker. It was characteristic of the Duke of Kent that he should have included Millbank in his honeymoon roundabout. This time it was 'gratification' rather than 'appro-

bation' which the royal visitors experienced in the highest degree. They heard the prisoners examined by the prison chaplain " in the system of instruction adopted in the Penitentiary ", and when they left what *The Times* described as " the interesting scene ", they drove to Westminster.

For various reasons the Duke of Kent might well regard Westminster as a neighbourhood even more replete with interest than Millbank. There in both Houses a vote had been passed in 1794, expressing thanks to himself and several other officers under the command of Sir Charles Grey " for their gallant conduct and meritorious exertions in the West Indies " ; there, during the debates on the Mary Ann Clarke scandals in 1809, he had intervened (though suffering from an inflammatory cold) on the side of the Duke of York — to whom the thanks of Parliament had never been voted for any exertions of *his* ; there in the Regency debates of 1810 he had exhibited that spirit of fraternal magnanimity so poorly requited by its object. It is also true that his financial difficulties had more than once been the theme of discussion in both Houses ; but, as he himself might have put it, the more gratifying associations would be paramount on the present occasion.

The thoughts aroused by the contemplation of Westminster Abbey were more interesting still. From every point of view it was desirable that the Duchess should be introduced to the Coronation Chair and the Stone of Destiny. " His information was varied and copious," wrote one of the Duke's panegyrists, and where could he find a better outlet ? First things, however, must come first : and to so earnest a Radical it was natural that St. Stephen's should take precedence over St. Peter's. The royal visitors accordingly drove first to the Houses of Parliament.

Sixteen years later that haphazard huddle of medieval

buildings was destroyed by fire. What remained of St. Stephen's Chapel, the Star Chamber, and the Painted Chamber was demolished to make way for the vast neo-Gothic structure designed by Sir Charles Barry with the aid of the ingenious Mr. Pugin, and it is not easy now to imagine the scene which met the eyes of the royal visitors on that August day in the year 1818. The House of Lords then occupied a vaulted oblong chamber known in Plantagenet times as the Court of Requests. Elizabethan tapestries representing the defeat of the Armada draped the walls: above the gilded throne was a crimson canopy supported by Corinthian columns, also gilt. The way of approach for royalty was at the south-east corner of Palace Yard, through a vaulted corridor and up a flight of stairs, dimly lit with painted windows and elaborately fretted with carved stone. Separating the Lords from the Commons was the Painted Chamber, the reputed scene of Edward the Confessor's death, the early fourteenth-century frescoes from which it took its name being in its later years hidden by wainscot and arras-cloth.

There was nothing impressive about the rather poky Lower House, with its three round-headed blank glass windows behind the Speaker's chair, and its triple brazen chandelier depending from the centre of the ceiling. In the summer of 1818 Parliament had made one of its periodical attempts to smarten itself up. A new chair had been purchased for Mr. Speaker; new scarlet draperies had been hung over it, and there was new matting on the floor.

For some reason, chair, draperies, and matting exercised a powerful fascination over the Duke and Duchess. So much time did they spend in admiration, it was found to be too late for the projected visit to the Abbey; and so it befell that the father and mother of Queen Victoria never contemplated together the austere and ancient chair upon

which their only child was destined to sit nineteen years later.

It was now the turn of amusement in the royal programme, and on August 31 the Duke and Duchess went to Covent Garden to see the *Indian Ballet*, in which "the American savages exhibited their agility". But already the London chapter of their honeymoon was drawing to a close. The Duke's trustees had advanced him the money necessary to meet the expense of "the nuptials", and though these were "conducted with every possible regard to economy", this alienation of funds intended for the liquidation of the bridegroom's debts had necessarily removed his solvency a stage further away. The financial situation grew every day more embarrassing. An ungrateful nation, forgetting the Duke's strenuous years of service in the West Indies, in Gibraltar, and in Canada, seemed disinclined to fork out further. The Queen, perhaps dreading another suggestion from her son's friends in Parliament that she might come to his relief out of her Privy Purse, urged him to go back to the Continent. Not without reason did the Duke of Kent remark to Mr. Creevey soon after that his mother was "a person of the greatest possible firmness of mind". She would not listen to any offers of his to remain with her; "and indeed", added the Duke, "nothing but her pressing me to come abroad could have made me do so". Few voices — if any — were raised to bid him stay. And dignity might be saved by the pretence that the Duchess's duties to her son demanded that she should spend some time at Amorbach.

Squiring his new Duchess had left the Duke scant leisure for his old friends, and in writing on August 24 to apologize for his seeming neglect of Mrs. Fitzherbert he pleaded the situation that he had been placed in for the last seven weeks: not exactly a gallant way of putting it, though the 'situa-

tion' cannot have been one of unmixed felicity, with insistent creditors always in the offing. Yet the seven weeks had not been wasted. The Duchess's mind had been stored with useful impressions. And she had so far captured the interest of the feminine part of the population that a costume had been introduced called " the Victoria déshabille or Duchess of Kent's morning dress ". It was of " lavender-coloured Italian crape, made partially high, with a pelerine cape and elegantly trimmed with satin in the same colour as the robe ". The colour was more austere than one would have expected to find linked with the name of a lady whose taste tended more often to exuberant floral effects and dazzling, fantastic tartans.

On the evening of September 6, 1818, the *Royal Sovereign* lay at anchor off Dover, with her yards manned. A guard of honour was drawn up on the quay. On the castle heights the gunners stood ready. At six o'clock the signal was given, and a salute announced that the Duke and Duchess of Kent had boarded the royal yacht. At seven they sat down to dinner, cheered by " select and beautiful airs " played on the quarter-deck by the band of the 31st Regiment. The faithful Spaeth was in attendance on her mistress, who had in addition two dressers, Mesdames Conradi and Brogniard.

The Duke, as a seasoned traveller, would find nothing novel in yet another Channel crossing, but it was only the second time in her life that the Duchess had made a sea voyage, however short, and a little agitation might have been forgiven her. Yet it would be pleasant to see Amorbach again, and the children ; and it was well that Leopold, instead of remaining alone at Claremont, had set off to visit their sister the Grand Duchess Constantine, then living in solitary seclusion at Berne. As for the cause of their departure, financial difficulties were nothing new ; indeed, they

were almost common form; and time would bring the remedy.

The evening was not very fine; but presently there reached the ears of the Duke and Duchess as they sat at dinner a sound more musical even than the airs played by the band of the 31st — the sound of cheering. A loyal multitude had gathered on the quay; and before long it was rewarded by a glimpse of two figures bowing graciously on the deck. Again, and then yet again, the Duke and Duchess were called back by fresh bursts of enthusiasm. Then, with a final inclination towards the English shore, they went below.

All night the *Royal Sovereign* lay at anchor, waiting for the early morning tide. At 3 A.M. on September 7 she hoisted her sails and began to move, while sleepy artillerymen fired a farewell salute. This time no forest of respectful hats waved along the quay. The royal travellers were not called upon to clamber on to the deck again, and — unless the cannon awoke them — they were left undisturbed until the yacht was well out to sea. That the Duchess should be spared fatigue and agitation was more important than anyone yet realized. Less than nine months later her daughter, the future Queen Victoria, was born.

CHAPTER III

CONTINENTAL INTERLUDE

The British chief for mighty toils renowned,
Increased in titles and with conquests crowned,
To Belgian coasts his tedious march renews
And the long windings of the Rhine pursues.

ADDISON, *The Campaign*

THREE years after Waterloo there was still upon the Continent a joint army of occupation under the supreme command of the Duke of Wellington. Its duties left its officers a good deal of leisure, and it became rather a favourite plan for Englishmen in quest of entertainment to visit occupied territory, attending balls, dinners, and reviews, and hobnobbing with the great. Among these visitors was Mr. Thomas Creevey, the same indiscreet confidant to whom the Duke of Kent had unburdened himself at Brussels after Princess Charlotte's death. Mr. Creevey was friendly with Wellington, whom he nicknamed 'the Beau', and they both got quite a lot of amusement out of the oddities of His Royal Highness during the autumn of 1818.

The Duke of Kent, blandly unconscious that Wellington regarded him as anything but an earnest and efficient fellow-soldier, proceeded first to Cambrai, understanding that G.H.Q. were situated there, and proposing to pay his respects to the Commander-in-Chief.

At length the fame of England's hero drew
Eugenio to the famous interview;

> Great souls by instinct to each other turn,
> Demand alliance and in friendship burn.

On his arrival Kent found that His Grace had transferred himself to Valenciennes, and promptly followed him thither, reaching that uninspiring town just in time to be present, with the Duchess, at a large official dinner-party.

A more picturesque scene it would be difficult to imagine. Among the officers of the army of occupation there would be every sort of brilliant uniform, with every variety of frog and epaulette, cocked hat and sabretache. Wellington's own appearance was, " as always on such occasions, *quite perfect* " ; but the appearance of his royal guest was described by Mr. Creevey as " atrocious ". Perhaps out of a gracious anxiety not to eclipse his host, perhaps because his Field-Marshal's uniform was not included in his baggage, the Duke of Kent elected to wear " the *jacket* and *cap* of his regiment ", the 1st or Royal Scots Regiment of Foot. And we are told that " but for his ribbon and star he might have passed for an orderly sergeant ".

This was the first meeting between the Duchess of Kent and the great soldier who was so strongly to influence the course of her life in England, but he seems to have been mainly concerned by the nice point as to who should " take out " her " old ugly German female companion ". To and fro among his staff he went, finding no one ready to settle the question for him. Finally, he sent for the Mayor of Valenciennes, a fine figure of a man, and upon his worship's arm Spaeth was duly conducted to the dinner-table.

The edification of the Duchess and the enlargement of her mind were not objects so easy of attainment in this gay military atmosphere as they had been in England. Yet a review is undeniably an instructive spectacle, especially if witnessed in company with someone well qualified to explain the evolutions of the troops taking part ; and on

September 11 the Duke conducted his wife to the joint review of the British and the Russians. It was perhaps by chance that the alternation of improving and amusing engagements was maintained, but there can have been few more brilliant pages in the Duchess's book of memory than the dinner and ball given the same evening by the Russian Commander-in-Chief, Count Woronzow, in honour of the Duke of Wellington and Lord Hill. As the years of her life unfolded it was her fate to attend many reviews and not a few balls; yet none can have had the same colour and movement as these, where the Cossacks manœuvred first on the review-ground and then on the ballroom floor with their incomparable spirit and skill.

Count Woronzow had all the charm of the Russian ruling caste. "He was", wrote the usually critical Creevey, "the most captivating person I have ever seen." Later, he made his home in England, where he died in 1832, in Mansfield Street, Portland Place, "in the act of smiling on his children and blessing them". His son was Governor of the Crimea and Bessarabia, and his daughter, who married the eleventh Earl of Pembroke, was the mother of Florence Nightingale's Sidney Herbert. Under the auspices of so fascinating a host the ball could hardly fail to be a success, and Prince Nariskin, the commander of the Cossack contingent, delighted the company by dancing a "Mizurko" with his sister, Madame Suvarov. Then, perhaps not to their delight, but almost certainly to their mild surprise, "the Duchess of Kent waltzed a little".

The waltz had been introduced into England about 1813, largely through the influence of the Russian ambassadress, Dorothea, Princess Lieven, who had given a demonstration at Almack's and thereby converted the younger, gayer, and more rebellious part of society. There were, however, many persons neither old nor serious who looked on with

some misgivings while their wives, daughters, and sweethearts surrendered themselves to the new and dangerous enchantment.

The Princesses did not waltz when they graced their brother's balls at Carlton House, and when even so revolutionary an observer as Lord Byron frowned it was hardly to be expected that the Prince Regent would smile. The time came when the Duchess of Kent would range herself on the side of decorum, and decree that "on account of her station" Princess Victoria should waltz only with her dancing mistress; but at Valenciennes she revolved long enough to become noticeably flushed. Observing this, the Duke of Kent "put his hand upon her cheek to feel if she was not too hot". What Creevey called "this display of tenderness" was a source of rather ill-natured glee to him and Wellington.

Her Royal Highness's heightened colour was due to a touch of fever as well as to her dancing, and a few days later the London newspapers informed their readers that she was "much indisposed".

Looking back at that autumn of 1818, it is impossible not to feel that the whole fabric, form, and colour of nineteenth-century England would have been different if the Duchess's indisposition had resulted in a miscarriage. To the men who were then alive the dynastic prospect was uncertain and obscure. Though three royal Duchesses bid fair to maintain "the great illustrious Line", the romantic appeal of a youthful sovereign was not likely to be made in the lifetime of any person then living. From two to four middle-aged men stood between the still-shadowy infant and its inheritance. It is true that three of the four were gouty, corpulent, and out of condition; but the fourth enjoyed the robust health which he had fostered by leading a godly and sober if not, strictly speaking, a righteous life. With George

III's fine physique and voluble tongue his son Edward had inherited none of his engaging simplicity of character. There was — there still is — a curious enigmatic quality about the Duke of Kent. No living man could have been the compound of Tartuffe and Pecksniff which he sometimes appeared to be. There is often something about him that suggests Pope's couplet,

> Religion, blustering, veils her sacred fires,
> And, unawares, Morality expires.

We know that some of his good deeds were done by stealth ; and it is agreeable to think that some of his pious utterances came from the heart. Yet, outside the circle of his rather solemn, bourgeois friends, there must have been many people who looked forward with something like dismay to the possibility that he might one day be King, and that, humanly speaking, a son or daughter of his would have to wait a long time for the crown. An uninspiring vista of middle-aged monarchs stretched away to the horizon. It seemed as if youth had died with Princess Charlotte and her child.

For the past fifty years — and more — English princes in quest of wives had found their field of choice narrowed by the necessity of preserving the Protestant character of the dynasty. As a result, the English nation had become reconciled to the idea that its Queens Consort should be uncompromisingly German — on the principle of the further from Rome the nearer to grace. Oddly enough — and it has been insufficiently realized by historians — Victoria of Leiningen was the least 'German' of the three Duchesses who entered the Family that year. The Coburgs were a singularly cosmopolitan family ; they were good linguists, and French was a second mother-tongue to most of them. One of the daughters had married a Frenchman ;

another, a Russian; and Prince Charles of Leiningen, the husband of the youngest, had been half-Lorrainer, half-Franconian, and wholly Frenchified. With her dark eyes, her immense zest of living, her love of dancing and play-going, the Duchess of Kent represented a long step away from the blonde and sedate German type embodied in the Duchess of Clarence; and even the handsome young Duchess of Cambridge seemed a little Teutonic beside her. In this military and social atmosphere no one could have been more happily at home than herself. Having thrown off the feverish chill which alarmed the Duke, she went with him to Aix-la-Chapelle, their house in Brussels being temporarily tenanted by the womankind of the Tsar Alexander I.

In the ancient capital of Charlemagne's Empire monarchs and their ministers had then assembled for the first of the periodic "meetings consecrated to great common objects" foreshadowed in Article VI of the Second Peace of Paris. This Article represented Castlereagh's alternative to the Tsar's impracticable scheme of a Holy Alliance of Christian States, and if human nature had undergone some miraculous alteration it might have worked at least as well as later attempts along the same line. At the Conference of 1818 there were already present those conflicting elements of idealism and self-seeking with which the modern world is only too familiar; but in one respect at least Aix-la-Chapelle scored over Geneva — all the delegates were more or less decorative, two of them were Emperors, and one was a King, if only a King of Prussia. Alexander of Russia was there, Byron's

> Coxcomb Czar,
> The autocrat of waltzes and of war.

With him were Nesselrode and Capo d'Istria. The Emperor of Austria had brought his astute if susceptible Chancellor, Prince Metternich. Wellington and Castlereagh, both of

whom considered that the Tsar's mind was " not completely sound ", represented England. Prussia sent Prince Hardenberg and Count Bernsdorff to do the actual diplomatic work, with King Frederick William III as a figurehead. These four Allied Powers were assembled chiefly to consider the withdrawal of the army of occupation from France, and their future relations with her and with each other. Other subjects cropped up — the slave trade, the Barbary corsairs, the treatment of Napoleon, the position of the Jewish section of the populations of Austria and Prussia. At first it is a little difficult to imagine what the Duke of Kent was doing at this Congress. He had no official status, and none of the topics on the agenda fell obviously within his sphere. But one seems to hear an echo of earlier royal utterances when it is stated that a memorial " on behalf of the working classes " was addressed to the Allied Sovereigns by Mr. Robert Owen.

The Duke of Kent's friendship with that remarkable man must have been a source of puzzlement as well as of annoyance to the Prince Regent. Robert Owen might well have seemed a bold innovator even in these less easily startled times. Only a year before he had presented to a Parliamentary Committee a report on the Poor Law which embodied some propositions of a character sufficiently revolutionary to cause much shaking of honourable members' heads. The period immediately following the Napoleonic wars was, like all post-war periods, one of great economic and social difficulty. Victorious England found her trade stagnant, her population impoverished, and her traditional framework knocked awry. Yet to most people the remedy suggested by Robert Owen, reformer, cotton-spinner, and mystic, looked more alarming than the disease.

Basing his ideas on the dangers of the competition between human and mechanical labour, he held that the

only effective system of social government would be one in which men should act in unison, and, while exploiting machinery for their own good, so control its use that it should cease to be dangerous. In this, as in some other things, he anticipated *Erewhon* by many years. But however reasonable the proposition may have appeared when stated in its elementary and abstract form, it bore a very different complexion when Mr. Owen passed to its practical application. Let the land, he said, be parcelled out in lots of from one thousand to fifteen hundred acres, each supporting about twelve hundred persons. Let them live in one large building, cook in a communal kitchen, and dine together in hall. After the age of three years each child was to be cared for and educated by the State, though not cut off from contact with its parents. And as these communities increased in number, they would unite in an expanding federation which would ultimately " embrace the whole world in a common interest ".

Even those disapproving people to whom these visions seemed most insane could not accuse the visionary of being without solid experience. At New Lanark, where his father-in-law, David Dale, had been the chief owner of large spinning-mills, Owen had put many of his theories to the test, with conspicuous success, commercial as well as moral. It was difficult to pour scorn upon a system which had proved itself to be economically sound. Jeremy Bentham and William Allen, among other serious men, rallied to the support of the ardent, dyspeptic Welshman with the broad provincial accent. And as the Duke of Kent did not hesitate to range himself with them, he must have been cognizant of Owen's memorandum, if, indeed, the idea did not emanate from his own mind.

His Royal Highness did not make a long stay at Aix-la-Chapelle in the autumn of 1818 ; he did not even tarry to

witness the signature, on October 9, of the treaty by which the military occupation of France was terminated ; but with the Duchess he was present at the ball given by the town to the Allied Sovereigns on October 4. Unfortunately Mr. Creevey was not present to record whether the Duchess waltzed a little, much, or at all. She was able the next morning to set off with her husband for Amorbach.

It was not to be expected that the Duke of Kent could resist the temptation to reconstruct and embellish the Schloss, and to this task he addressed himself with the least possible delay. Workmen were sent for from England in such large numbers that a temporary barrack had to be built to house them. The good folk of the principality were to be edified by the wonders of English plumbing, English gardening, and English methods of stable management. More — they were to be educated, such of them who stood in need of it, irrespective of age or sex, according to the principles of the British and Foreign School Society. Meanwhile the Duchess, reunited with her children and her pet birds, enjoyed a brief period of repose. Spaeth and Lehzen were also reunited, not to part again until many years later, when the simplicity of one and the duplicity of the other left Lehzen temporarily in possession of the field.

One character in which the Duke of Kent shone was that of stepfather, and it can hardly be doubted that in the character of father he would have acquitted himself well. The youthful Feodore was completely won over by his kindness, and though no record remains of the reactions of the youthful Charles they are unlikely to have differed greatly from those of his sister. In later years the Prince of Leiningen piously preserved relics of the Duke at Amorbach, and he paid to his memory the compliment which would have been prized above all others—that of carrying out several of his pet plans there.

Affectionate parent though George III had been to all his daughters, there was an element of aloofness and austerity in his attitude towards all his sons except Octavius — and Octavius did not live to affront the King by a too-marked affinity with His Majesty's less reputable ancestors. Having before his eyes the unfortunate results of the repression — or absence — of natural tenderness, Kent had already shown himself in relation to the young de Salaberrys the most approachable of men, and if ever any record should come to light of his demeanour towards his children by Madame de St. Laurent it will almost certainly be of the same pattern. He did not think, however, that it was necessary that the Duchess should remain long with her son and daughter in the autumn of 1818, for the " travelling baroutsch " was soon ordered out again, and Mesdames Conradi and Brogniard were instructed to pack as many gowns and pelisses, bonnets and shawls as their mistress might require for a visit to Switzerland.

On October 28 the pregnancy of the Duchess of Clarence was formally notified to the Prince Regent : ten days later appeared a rumour — not as yet officially confirmed — that the Duchess of Kent was " pronounced to be in a favourable way to give her royal consort an heir ", and that the Duke and Duchess were to return to England for the *accouchement.*

The Duke cannot be acquitted of an extraordinary lack of solicitude for the unborn child which — whatever happened — was bound to be dynastically important. The season was inclement, the roads were bad, the autumn was far advanced, and yet he took his wife to visit her sister the Grand Duchess Constantine in her Swiss retreat. All the Coburg family were deeply attached to their sister Julia, and the Duke of Kent's action may have been dictated by anxiety to humour his Victoria at a time when opposition might have proved unwise. If her health had been unsatis-

factory, he might have been less complaisant; but the discomforts of her condition cannot have weighed heavily upon her, or she would hardly have chosen to "visit the glaciers of the Grindelwald" or go to the "valley of the Lauterbourg to view the Staubbach".

Fifty years earlier, when mountains were regarded as being 'horrid' rather than awe-inspiring and before the Romantic Revival had made wild scenery the mode, the Duchess might have escaped this rather arduous pilgrimage, and with it the instructive running commentary of the Duke, who was not the man to let pass this opportunity of imparting information.

Meanwhile his friends in England were not forgetting him, and on his birthday, November 2, his tradesmen in London illuminated their windows — a gesture savouring either of optimism or of forbearance, for there was none of them who was not also his creditor. A little more than a fortnight later Queen Charlotte died, and Mr. Vicke, the King's Messenger, was sent to Aix-la-Chapelle with the official intimation of the news. The family and household at Amorbach were thereupon placed in the deepest mourning, those trappings and suits of Regency bereavement that we can hardly imagine in these days. Even the fans of the ladies and the buckles of the gentlemen were black; fichus were of plain lawn, cravats of plain muslin: and already those gruesome appendages known as 'weepers' were attached to male hats.

Any regret which the Duke of Kent may have felt for his mother must have been sensibly mitigated by his satisfaction at the knowledge that the Duchess was now well on the way towards fulfilling the gipsy's prophecy. If his sisters-in-law of Clarence, Cumberland, and Cambridge had given birth to living children while his own marriage remained unfruitful he might well have felt, not for the first time, that the stars

in their courses were fighting against him. This belief was not incompatible with a steadfast confidence in the wisdom of Providence, but it was easier to acknowledge that wisdom when it expressed itself in marks of divine favour.

Autumn waned, winter descended upon Amorbach, and Her Royal Highness continued the quiet train of her life, playing the piano, studying English, amusing herself with her pet dogs and birds, and supervising the lessons which Lehzen was giving to the docile Feodore. Meanwhile, in such leisure as the direction of building operations left him, the Duke was seriously considering by what means he could get his wife back to England for her confinement, and corresponding with those persons there whose wealth or influence might make them serviceable.

Though, according to the *Morning Chronicle*, it was " the mutual wish " of the Duke and Duchess of Clarence that *their* child should be born in England, no arrangements had been made to that end, and they were now settled at Hanover, near the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. The dynasty had never ceased to cultivate sentimental as well as official relations with the little state from which it took its name ; the Duke of Cambridge was its Governor ; and the Prince Regent was understood to have intimated a desire that his newly-married brothers should continue to reside abroad.

The Duke of Cumberland, though not a recent bridegroom, was included in this fraternal hint, and he betook himself to Germany with his graceful wife, Queen Charlotte's niece, whose advent into the Family had caused so little joy to her aunt. They, too, contributed a baby to the dynastic store in the following year.

The Duke of Kent looked at these things from a different angle. Like his father, he " gloried in the name of Briton ". Unlike his father, he realized that Continental connections

were becoming less acceptable to the English in proportion as the bogy of a Jacobite restoration grew dim. There was now no danger of a Popish claimant to the throne rallying to himself all the rebels in Scotland and Ireland and all the malcontents in England. National arrogance, heightened by the victory over Napoleon, was half-unconsciously resentful of the perpetual reiteration of the German theme. Never again would the nation acquiesce in the foreign education of its royal princes, or watch with complacency while they were detached from their natural background and whisked off during their most plastic years to Hanover, Geneva, or Göttingen.

All this the Duke of Kent may not have defined, but he certainly perceived. It was therefore of paramount importance that *his* infant should be technically English-born. Nothing he could do would augment the drops of English blood in its veins, those few, far-off drops derived from such non-royal wives of Plantagenets as Cicely Neville and Elizabeth Woodville; and nothing he could say would persuade the unresponsive Regent to smooth his path home. The frail thread of George III's life was wearing thin; no longer had he sufficient energy to entertain imaginary Empresses to dinner or plan fantastic punishments for obnoxious ministers; and it was obvious to everyone that the beginning of a new reign could not now be far distant. There were two ceremonies which the future George IV regarded with a marked lack of enthusiasm: christenings and funerals. What he called "the black glove period" must necessarily coincide with the dawn of his kingship; but was it inevitable that its dignity should be marred by the corals and bells of new-born nephews and nieces? He thought not. And it was with a suspicious eye that he observed the manœuvres of the Duke of Kent about this time.

The Duke's problem was a simple one. All he wanted was "means to meet the expenses of the journey". But, observes one of his biographers with indignation, "no tender of the slightest pecuniary assistance from those in power greeted him". It does not seem to have occurred to the Duke's friends, but may well have struck his enemies, that the money he had laid out in superfluous jaunts to Aix-la-Chapelle and the Grindelwald, the £10,000 expended upon the new stables for his thirty-six horses at Amorbach, might well have provided him with the means desired. Allusions to Castle Hill, on which he had lavished more than fifty thousand pounds, might have been irrelevant, as the debt was incurred before his marriage, but practical men must sometimes have been irritated by the attitude of a Prince so unpractical.

Strangely enough, it was among practical men that he found his support when the Regent and his ministers proved unresponsive. Alderman Wood, Robert Owen, William Allen, hard-headed business people, members of the commercial community destined two reigns later to become so powerful a factor in the State, these were the friends whose generosity ensured the fulfilment of the Duke's wish that his child might "draw its first breath upon English ground". Both he and the Duchess, it seems, deprecated the idea that it might "first see the light in a retired spot in Germany" and be subjected to "the thousand-and-one rumours that might hereafter be raised relative to its identity". It does not seem to have occurred either to the Duke of Clarence or the Duke of Cambridge that any rumours would be raised relative to the identity of their respective offspring, and it was a fantastic notion. No question of a disputed succession was involved; and nobody had any conceivable motive for playing the sort of trick which the Whigs of 1688 affected to believe had been played by James II. But

one feels that it was exactly the sort of *affre* that would alarm the Duke of Kent.

Ever a voluminous correspondent, he poured forth reams of letters in his beautiful, symmetrical script, keeping friends and kinsfolk in touch with his difficulties and his desires. Christmas came and went, marked by the exchange of gifts between the Duchess and her whole household, and graced by the traditional Christmas-tree twinkling with coloured candles. And still "those in power" seemed firmly disinclined to further the Duke's wishes.

The Duchess had now passed the critical fifth month, and it was desirable that she should make the journey to England before the even more critical seventh was reached. The Duke redoubled his exertions, epistolary and otherwise, and chose as his confidant among the Sisterhood not his former favourite, Princess Sophia, but Princess Mary, Duchess of Gloucester. The reason for the choice is obscure, though it may have been dictated by reluctance to agitate Princess Sophia. Princess Mary promptly communicated the gist of their brother's letter to the Prince Regent. Edward had written, she said, on March 22, emphasizing his intention of "coming to England without delay, if he could raise the ways and means through *Friends*". He felt it a duty he owed to his "dearest Victoria" to apply for the royal yacht; but, he added resolutely, "if that cannot be managed I shall bring her over in the *Packet*". Princess Mary viewed the whole scheme with misgiving. Her first reaction seems to have been less humane than might have been expected from "dear sweet Miny", though a journey "by the Packet" was an ordeal to which few people would have cared to subject any woman in the Duchess's condition. Two years earlier the first steam-and-sail cross-Channel ship had begun to ply from Brighton to Le Havre, but the introduction of the new motive power had added little, if

anything, to the amenities of such craft.

" I wish I may be wrong ", wrote Princess Mary to the Regent, " but I fear it is a *deep — very* deep-layed plan." Kind-hearted though she was, she seems to have shared her eldest brother's anxiety that the Duke and Duchess of Kent should follow the example of their brothers and sisters of Clarence and Cambridge and remain on the Continent. Another sister, Princess Augusta, also regarded the Duke's conduct with disapproval. " I am ", she wrote, " outrageous with Edward, for he is behaving like a fool and a madman."

Meanwhile the two Duchesses in residence at Hanover had given birth to their children. On March 26, 1819, the Duchess of Cambridge had the pleasure of presenting her Duke with a handsome son, the future Field-Marshal and Commander-in-Chief. Only one day later the Duchess of Clarence, less fortunate, was prematurely confined, and her daughter lived only seven hours — just long enough to be baptized by the Duke of Cambridge's chaplain with the names of Charlotte Augusta Louisa. The Duke of Clarence's disappointment was augmented by the serious state of Adelaide, who was " afflicted with spasms ", and by the discomforts of their residence at Hanover.

There was nothing to disconcert the Duke of Kent in the arrival of his first lawfully-born nephew, and the news of the death of his third lawfully-born niece,[1] though received with proper regret, can hardly have failed to inspire reflections upon the inscrutable ways of Providence. " The interesting situation of the Duchess ", he wrote to Dr. Budge, " causes me hourly anxiety, and you, who so well know my views and feelings, can appreciate how eagerly desirous I am to hasten on our departure to Old England."

[1] The Duchess of Cumberland had already had a daughter who hardly survived birth.

Another friend to whom his views and feelings were equally well known, his trustee, William Allen, now sent a draft to Frankfort, and as soon as it was in His Royal Highness's hands, the word was given, and the Kent family took the road.

Like his eldest brother, the Duke was an excellent whip. It is therefore hardly surprising that he should have decided himself to pilot the travelling-chariot from Amorbach to Calais. "An unbelievably odd cavalcade" was the comment of a traveller who encountered it. Its baggage, consisting largely of the coffin-like, nail-studded horsehair trunks of the period and including the Duke's mahogany case full of crystal flasks and silver-mounted first-aid equipment, was further augmented by the cages containing the Duchess's pet birds. As she took her seat, she held in her arms the pet dogs which shared her favour with the waxbills and canaries. The faithful Spaeth was in attendance, prompt, one feels, with smelling-salts, muffs, and shawls. And Feodore this time was not left behind. A beautiful, serious girl, with the fine Coburg eyes and almost ethereally delicate features, she formed one of the party, under the care of her governess, Louise Lehzen.

As the chariot swings, creaks, and rattles across Germany and France, we may pause to consider in more detail the person and character of that remarkable woman, Louise Lehzen. In books written during Queen Victoria's lifetime she was not unnaturally represented as the devoted preceptress under whose wing the Queen's childhood and girlhood were passed. No hint was dropped as to the part she played in alienating the Duchess of Kent from her daughter, and only from the *Greville Memoirs* could it be divined that behind all the Palace intrigues at Kensington during the minority of Victoria lurked the diminutive, dusky figure of "dearest Lehzen". As time

passed and knowledge grew, biographers began to blame the Queen's governess for all her pupil's limitations, and to depict Lehzen as an ignorant, hide-bound, provincial German, in no way fitted to mould the intellect of a future sovereign of these realms. They did not pause to enquire why the Princess of Leiningen, herself a well-educated woman according to the standards of the time, should have chosen for her elder daughter's governess a person so imperfectly equipped for the task; nor why George IV and William IV, Prince Leopold and Stockmar, should have regarded with unexpectedly unanimous approval anyone so unworthy of it.

The Duchess of Northumberland became official governess to the young Princess in 1830, and her auxiliaries, clerical and lay, must divide the blame among them if Queen Victoria was less erudite than Queen Elizabeth; but long after that date we find Lehzen, then "lady in attendance", reading aloud — and even dictating — from Madame de Sévigné, Racine, and Corneille. Lord Broughton notes that Lehzen herself told him that her pupil had read *Rasselas*, *Ivanhoe*, and selections from Scott and Byron; and we have her own testimony — in a letter to the Queen — that she told her that Latin was "the foundation of the English Grammar and of all the elegant expressions". Victoria's confession to Lord Melbourne that "the placing of who and whom" puzzled her may be thought to reflect badly upon her earliest preceptress; but many writers who have enjoyed academic opportunities denied to even the most accomplished women of that period seem still to feel the same uncertainty.

As to the character of this enigmatic woman the evidence is conflicting. The part played by her in the tragedy of Lady Flora Hastings suggests that she was vindictive and petty-minded. Yet when Lady Lyttelton took up her duties

as Lady of the Bedchamber in 1838 she found her " very kind and helpful " ; and in describing the scene when the Queen was walking on the Terrace at Windsor to the sound of military music she gives us this revealing glimpse of the Queen's still most intimate friend : " . . . not least pleasing to me, Mme de Lehzen's pale face (the only face I ever see that seems to feel what is going on *at all*) with her usual half-anxious, smiling, fixed look following the Queen from one of the Castle windows ". The slow, insidious methods by which Victoria was alienated from her mother suggest that the governess was both unscrupulous and sly ; and yet she trained her pupil in the strictest habits of truth.

Another mistaken impression is that Lehzen was consistently prim and austere. Yet Lord Broughton recorded in 1837 that on one occasion at Windsor, during a visit of the King and Queen of the Belgians, " she kept up a lively fire upon Lord Glenelg, accusing him half in fun of being too lazy " ; and it is surely significant that when Princess Feodore adverted to the " dismal existence " led by herself and her royal half-sister in their childhood, she excepted from the general dismality the happy time when they went or drove out " with Lehzen ". Even the image of her as stealing about Kensington Palace nibbling caraway seeds and fixing critical dark eyes upon the Duchess and Sir John Conroy should be corrected by her portrait on horseback, with low-crowned top-hat and flowing habit, riding a dun cob called Zampa or a smart little mare of the Duchess's, Rosa by name, and forming one of a cavalcade which included the Duchess herself, Princess Victoria, Sir John and his children, and sometimes even Lady Conroy.

All these things were still far off in the early spring of 1819 when Louise Lehzen accompanied Feodore to England and saw for the first time the country where the best years of her outwardly uneventful life were to be spent. The



EDWARD AUGUSTUS, DUKE OF KENT AND STRATHEARN
From a portrait by Dawe
Rischgitz Studios

mother of her pupil was happily married to a large and robust Royal Duke, to whom she was about to bear a child. As a Lutheran pastor's daughter Lehzen would envisage with satisfaction the opening vista of virtuous domesticity. In this she was of one mind with the faithful but slightly gushing Spaeth. The two were — and remained — good friends, and the part played by Conroy in securing Spaeth's dismissal was to be one of the causes which embittered Lehzen against him.

On the way to England a halt was made at Brussels — that city of many memories. The distinguished party stayed at the Hôtel de Maldegham, and, after a brief interval for repose, continued their journey to Calais. Some powerful influence, perhaps dread of public opinion, perhaps the pleading of the Sisterhood, perhaps a twinge of genuine compunction, induced the Regent to give orders that the *Royal Sovereign* should be manned and provisioned, and then proceed to Calais to await the Duke and Duchess. On April 11 she dropped down the river, and when the "inconceivably odd cavalcade" reached that port she was ready to receive them with appropriate honours.

On April 23 the father and mother of Victoria landed at Dover after an uncomfortable four hours' crossing, and set off for London. The journey was broken at Cobham, where they were entertained by Lord Darnley, the son of that unfortunate peer who imagined his body to be made of glass. A suite of rooms had been prepared at Kensington Palace, in that wing once occupied by Caroline, Princess of Wales; but no hordes of plumbers, carpenters, and carpet-layers had been let loose there, nor had Mr. Nash, the Regent's architect, been commissioned to embellish or reconstruct. Prince Leopold, who had returned from Switzerland to Claremont, could well have afforded to make his sister's environment a little less shabby, but he appears

to have taken no steps to that end. The *Marquis Peu à Peu*, as his father-in-law nicknamed him, was beginning to peer out of the gulf of despair, and that summer he actually felt cheerful enough to go to Ascot. Meanwhile the Kents were at Kensington, waiting for what the Duke proudly called " the event ".

Public interest in the returned exiles was considerable. Sympathetic sightseers caught glimpses of the Duchess walking in the gardens of the Palace on the arm of her tall husband. How sound an instinct had the Duke shown in coming back to England ! Though neither the Duke of Clarence nor the Duke of Cambridge was personally unpopular, it was difficult for loyal enthusiasm to project itself to a point as remote as Hanover. Now there was an edifying spectacle no further away than Kensington — a happy and hopeful wedded pair.

The Duke's clerical friends " not in the Establishment " looked on with solemn approval, their favour already enlisted on behalf of the Duchess. To one of them His Royal Highness wrote about this time, " I trust my countrymen will duly appreciate the great sacrifice and exertion made by her in travelling at a period drawing so near her confinement ", and it is agreeable to deduce from this remark that the Duke himself appreciated it. He added the assurance that all was going on as well as he could possibly wish, and that he trusted that the prayers of his correspondent and those of his other friends would be " realised in witnessing a prosperous result to the Duchess's present interesting condition ".

Whether the Establishment mingled its petitions with those of the Nonconformist persuasion is less certain. The more conventional prelates, like the more reactionary peers, can have felt small interest in the offspring of a Prince whose political and religious orientation was so deplorable. The

words later placed by Disraeli in the mouth of Mr. Tadpole may be said to sum up the Duke's views about this time: "I would sooner be supported by the Wesleyans than by all the Marquesses in the peerage". One Bishop, however, may be presumed to have identified himself with His Royal Highness's hopes — his former tutor, Dr. Fisher, Bishop of Salisbury, who, as religious instructor to Princess Charlotte, had encouraged her desire to marry Prince Leopold, and whose niece, Mrs. John Conroy, was herself expecting a baby that year.

Upon Lord Liverpool, a mild and colourless man, devolved the delicate task of informing the Prince Regent that his brother had forwarded a request for the presence of official witnesses at the birth of his child. It was a natural request enough, but slightly suggestive of a warming-pan complex, and it was impossible that it should be received with pleasure. One rumour ran that the Regent immediately resolved to eject the whole Kent family; but wiser as well as more humane counsels prevailed, and the Duchess was allowed a month of comparative tranquillity at Kensington before her hour struck.

Local tradition, unsupported by documentary evidence, declares that the mother of Victoria was taken suddenly ill near the lodge to the west of the carriage entrance to the Palace, and that, though official records said otherwise, her baby was actually born within its modest red-brick walls — now the offices of Messrs. Mason and Mason. If this were indeed so, and if any doubt had arisen as to authenticity of the *accouchement*, the Duke's misgivings might not have proved to be without foundation. What is more likely is that the Duchess felt faint during a walk in the garden on the eve of her second daughter's birth, and rested for a time in the lodge-keeper's little parlour.

Another rumour stated that the birth had "caused

lengthened suffering and great danger to the Duchess"; but this was firmly endorsed as "*not true*" by Queen Victoria on the margin of Miss Agnes Strickland's suppressed biography, *Victoria from Birth to Bridal*. Surprise was caused by the circumstance that, though two English physicians, Dr. Davis and Dr. Wilson, were in attendance on the Duchess, the baby was brought into the world by the hands of a German woman doctor, Charlotte Siebold by name. Germany was ahead of France and England in the matter of the medical training of women, and Madame Siebold, herself the daughter of an eminent *accoucheur*, had been granted a diploma for her skill in midwifery. Three months later she officiated at the birth of the second son of Ernest and Luise of Saxe-Coburg, the future Prince Consort.

The Prince Regent had not been able to refuse his brother's request that the appropriate witnesses should be present at his infant's birth; but it was surely a little premature on the part of the Duke, when on May 24, 1819, Madame Siebold delivered the Duchess of a baby "as plump as a partridge", to introduce it to the waiting company as a "future Queen of Great Britain and Ireland". That company included the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Duke of Wellington and Mr. Canning, and it is certain that at least one of the group—Wellington to wit—beheld with amusement the exultation of the royal Papa. It may be true, as Mr. Neale declares, that "the joy of the Duke at the birth of his daughter and the safety of the Duchess was deep, abounding and uncontrollable"; the gipsy's prophecy may have stirred in his memory when he learned the sex of the child; and it is certain that he wrote to a friend, "As to the circumstance of the child not proving to be a son instead of a daughter, I feel it due to myself to declare that such sentiments [*sic*] are not in unison with my own; for I am decidedly of opinion that the decrees of Providence are at

all times wisest and best". Yet he had no reason to doubt that his Duchess would bear him more children than one, and there was always the possibility that they might have a son. The Salic law prevailed in Hanover, though not in Great Britain, and the accession of a female sovereign would necessarily break the link which had united them ever since "the wee, wee German lairdie" came over to wear the crown of the Stuart ancestors whom he so little resembled. Of this the Duke of Kent was well aware; and there is something to be said in support of the view that the robust girl-baby at Kensington was regarded by many people — including her parents — as a possible

> Harbinger preceding still the fates
> And prologue to the omen coming on.

It was also a little insensitive of the Duke to point a prophetic finger at Victoria's cradle while yet there was a reasonable hope that a healthy living child would be born to the Duke and Duchess of Clarence. That hope was not finally extinguished till after his own death.

CHAPTER IV

PRELUDE TO WIDOWHOOD

Britannia to Kensington turns a fond eye
Where the Prince of her Love, her true Patriot resides ;
Then on Leopold's sister our hopes all rely,
And with Victoria our grief for dear Charlotte subsides.
A CLERGYMAN, late of Oxford

FEW things in the character of the Duke of Kent were more curious than his attitude towards those sick-room and nursery details connected with birth and infancy from which most men in all ages have been inclined to shy away. It almost seemed that he took a sort of vicarious satisfaction in the fulfilment by the Duchess of the normal functions of motherhood, and one is irresistibly reminded of the primitive custom of the *couvade*, by which the father instead of the mother remained in bed after the birth of a child. It has been unkindly suggested that economy dictated the Duchess's decision to dispense with the services of a wet nurse, and provide her baby with what the Duke characteristically called " maternal nutriment ", but it is probable that she had followed this course with her elder children. Her first husband had been Frenchified at a period when the teachings of Rousseau had prevailed upon French ladies to emulate the female of the Noble Savage, with grievous results to the babies, brought to their mothers in overheated, overcrowded rooms, and nursed during intervals snatched from the loo-table or the dance-floor. As Princess

of Leiningen the Duchess had doubtless followed the precepts of Rousseau without imitating the unwisdom of his votaresses at Versailles, and as Duchess of Kent it was natural that she should do the same.

Cynics, hearing what she was doing, murmured " Thrift, thrift, Horatio ". Earnest-minded friends of the Duke wrote appreciatively to him, and thus drew forth pearls of royal pomposity. " Parental feeling ", he declared, " and a just sense of duty, and not the applause of the public, were the motives which actuated her in the line she adopted." And he added solemnly, " She is, however, most happy that the performance of an office, most interesting in its nature, has met with the wishes and feelings of society ".

However much store the Duke may have set by the good opinion and the goodwill of his ' Methody ' supporters, he elected to have the Duchess churched by a prelate of " the Establishment ", none other than Dr. Fisher, Bishop of Salisbury. On Sunday, June 29, 1819, he conducted her to the long, low, red-brick church beyond Palace Green. It was a church of no architectural pretensions, built in the reign of William and Mary, when the ruinous mediæval edifice was pulled down. Royal connections were stressed in the ' W and M ' monogram on the reading-desk, and by the gorgeous crimson-velvet curtains and cushions in the Palace pew. Grandiloquent Augustan monuments encumbered the walls ; and there were one or two semi-recumbent effigies of deceased gentlemen wearing togas and periwigs.

The Duchess's English studies had not yet progressed far enough for her to follow easily the words of the Psalms read by Dr. Fisher, but it is improbable that the Duke had omitted to translate them for her benefit, and she would be duly edified to hear his lordship addressing the Deity on her behalf in these words :

> The snares of death compassed me round about: and the pains of hell gat hold upon me.
>
> I found trouble and heaviness, and I called upon the name of the Lord: O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul.

Both she and the Duke must have associated themselves in all sincerity with the thanksgiving for her deliverance from "the great pain and peril of childbirth". The absence of any expression of gratitude for the birth of a child may be due to the fact that when the Book of Common Prayer was framed (and for long after) infant mortality was so high that such expressions might have been thought presumptuous and were only too likely to prove premature. None the less, the satisfaction of the Duke of Kent was of a kind that would direct itself consciously towards that Heaven where it was increasingly plain that he was neither undervalued nor forgotten.

Five days earlier the baby had been christened in the Grand Saloon of the Palace, with the degree of pomp and ceremony suitable to the baptism of a princess, but with rather less splendour than was appropriate to one already so near the line of succession. The gold font had been duly brought from the Tower, and the crimson and gold trappings of the Chapel Royal, St. James, added their rich colour to the scene. Dr. Manners Sutton, the same Archbishop of Canterbury who had frowned when the Duke of Kent had bandied texts of Scripture with him, performed the rite, and a portly, mature band of godfathers and godmothers stood round about. One of the godfathers, the Tsar Alexander, and two of the godmothers, the Duchess-Dowager of Coburg and the Dowager Queen of Würtemberg, were absent, and it had been feared that another godfather, the Prince Regent, might be absent also.

The question of the child's name had been left unsettled, largely owing to the Prince's dissatisfaction with those on

the list submitted to him. Both parents seem to have favoured 'Alexandrina', a compliment to the Tsar with whom Kent had been on terms sufficiently cordial to warrant his borrowing money from him. His Imperial Majesty, connected by marriage with the Coburgs as well as by friendship with the Kents, had agreed to stand sponsor, a circumstance hardly designed to please the Regent, whose vanity had been severely wounded by the flattery heaped on Alexander during the English peace celebrations of 1814. It has been suggested that the Duchess of Kent was thinking of a future Tsarevitch as a suitable husband for her younger daughter, if Providence should bless her later with a son. The idea might just as well have emanated from her husband, who had presumably been the channel through which the Lancasterian theory had been conveyed to the imperial consciousness: but there is no definite evidence, and if the Duchess indulged in any prophetic schemes of the kind, her fancy was more likely to wing its way to Coburg than to Petersburg.

The two absent Dowagers were represented by the baby's paternal aunts, the opulently handsome Princess Augusta and the gracefully charming Princess Mary, Duchess of Gloucester. Princess Sophia was not present — agitating ceremonies were banned by Sir Henry Halford — and the Duke of Sussex held aloof from that part of the proceedings honoured by the attendance of his eldest brother, though he appeared at the christening dinner at four o'clock. This unroyally early hour was fixed so that Princess Augusta should be able to get back to Frogmore the same evening.

'Augusta' being the name both of her maternal grandmother and her aunt, it is curious that the little Princess of Kent should not have received it — with others — at the font. According to one story, the Duke submitted to the Regent a list of names among which were 'Victoria',

'Georgiana', 'Alexandrina', and 'Augusta'. 'Charlotte' was a strange but not incomprehensible omission. Though it would have formed a link between the infant and her recently deceased paternal grandmother, as well as between her and her eldest aunt, the Queen of Würtemberg, it would also have been a continual and rather painful reminder of hopes frustrated in the person of Princess Charlotte, her cousin.

In common decency the Regent could hardly object to the inclusion of 'Victoria' in the list, but he could and did demur at 'Alexandrina'. Nobody seems to have thought then of the alternative form — 'Alexandra' — later borne with such grace by Queen Victoria's daughter-in-law. A delicate situation was created, and once more the Prince appeared before his sister-in-law's eyes in an unamiable and despotic light. It was the Duke of York who suggested that the question should be shelved for the moment, and that the obnoxious name might be conveyed to the Primate after he had the infant actually in his arms, when it would be too late for the Prince to make a scene. Another name had been put forward and rejected — the name of 'Elizabeth'.

When the company assembled at Kensington, and the Archbishop of Canterbury stood with the Bishop of London behind the glittering font, there was a long, awkward pause. His Grace, who had all the personal comeliness and social suavity of the Manners family, looked anxiously round. The two Duchesses and Princess Augusta were agitated: the two Royal Dukes, embarrassed: the Regent, his face tinged with the strange tawny pallor described by one of his doctors, walked up to the two lawn-sleeved figures and said coldly, "My lords, I suppose the ceremony may now begin?"

It began. And in due course, as prescribed by the

liturgy, the moment came when the chief sponsor had to inform the officiating cleric what name was to be given to the new inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. The Archbishop was equal to the occasion. Taking liberties with the Book of Common Prayer which reverend gentlemen not in the Establishment might have hesitated to take, he turned to the tall, sullen sponsor in the nut-brown wig and asked, " By what name does it please Your Royal Highness to call this child ? "

There was another pause. The Regent may have been taken aback ; he may have been annoyed ; he may have been reluctant to commit himself. At all events, he seems to have stood staring at Dr. Manners-Sutton, who had received no previous intimation as to the choice of names, but who, probably acting on a hint from the Duke of Kent, murmured interrogatively, " Elizabeth ? "

" On no account," said the Regent hastily.

" Charlotte ? "

" Certainly not."

At this point the Duchess of Kent, not surprisingly, burst into tears. The scene was as unseemly as it was disconcerting. And the Regent's much-admired deportment seems to have failed him altogether as he was understood to mutter that the child should receive its mother's name — Victoria.

The Duke of Kent had already expressed a wish that this should be one of his daughter's names, but he had obviously desired to temper its outlandishness by one which should be at once English and dynastic — such a name as ' Charlotte ', ' Georgiana ', or ' Elizabeth ', something well suited to a female sovereign of these realms. He does not seem to have felt any superstitious or sentimental dislike for the name of ' Charlotte ' ; after all, it was the name of the mother to whose memory the whole Family professed

devotion. 'George' was dynastically appropriate and traditionally English, and 'Georgiana' was as near as a feminine child could get. Did not 'Elizabeth' trail a suggestion of *Regina* behind it? Yet all these had been banned. The flustered Archbishop was about to baptize by the single name of 'Victoria' the little creature lying in the hollow of his lawn sleeve when the Duke of York intervened.

"Alexandrina Victoria," said he.

The Regent showed no more fight. Perhaps deportment had triumphed over temper; perhaps he was soothed by his success in averting both 'Charlotte' and 'Elizabeth'. No further painful pauses interrupted the ceremony, and after his carriage had clattered back to Carlton House, the ample form of the Duke of Sussex augmented the company and dinner was served. But it must have been a trying day for the Duchess of Kent, and the lack of harmony among her relations-in-law must have impressed itself upon her with fresh force.

The question of her child's name came up in Parliament on August 3, when Sir Matthew White Ridley proposed that it should be changed to 'Elizabeth'; but nothing came of this proposal, or of the movement, launched soon after the accession of William IV, to substitute 'Charlotte' for 'Victoria'. The Queen, who disliked being told that she resembled her grandmother, Queen Charlotte, and who had a sentimental Jacobite prejudice against Queen Elizabeth, was doubtless grateful in after years to the influences which worked to give her the name of 'Victoria'. Even when sympathy between her and her mother was most imperfect she seems to have clung to her mother's name. For a time she was nicknamed 'Drina', but it is significant that in the earliest letters written to her by Queen Adelaide she is addressed as 'Victoria'; that her aunt, the Queen of Würtemberg, wrote of her as 'Vicky'; and that on the

scrap of paper preserved in the British Museum her infant pencil, guided by dots, traced only her second Christian name.

In spite of pecuniary problems the Duke of Kent seems to have found life in England interesting and even enjoyable. He was soon swept away by the stream of philanthropy, and again his voice was heard on committees and at public meetings.

> Not a charity languish'd for lack of his aid,
> As Patron or President six own'd his name ;
> Kent ever prepar'd with a smile took the lead,
> And the virtuous protected and rescued from shame.

So wrote "a Clergyman, late of Oxford"; and the same reverend gentleman was among the people who peered into the Palace gardens when the infant was rather ostentatiously paraded in the arms of the dry nurse, Mrs. Brock.

> When young Alexandrina Victoria I saw
> As passing she clung to the fond nurse's breast,
> 'Twas a spectacle glowing a cold heart to thaw,
> From Leopold and Kent another Charlotte confess'd.

Meanwhile Leopold had settled at Marlborough House and, with Charlotte's life-sized portrait looking from the crimson-panelled wall, was entertaining occasional select companies of distinguished persons. Though pale as ever, he was observed to be less gaunt, and part of his leisure (and the nation's money) was devoted to planning embellishments for Claremont. The Duke and Duchess of Kent went to Mr. Blackler's exhibition gallery to inspect some stained-glass windows executed by him for the Prince.

Meanwhile the Duke's financial difficulties had risen to a climax, and honourable members had heard with mixed feelings "a petition for leave to present a petition for a Bill" to enable His Royal Highness "to dispose of a great

part of his property by lottery". Alderman Wood supported the motion, and mentioned that the Duke was willing to take this step "rather than that the payment of his creditors should be longer delayed, or that his royal consort should be submitted to privations". But the House was unsympathetic; Lord Castlereagh was hostile; the motion was withdrawn; and the posters which had been pasted up throughout England to advertise the lottery were either torn down or allowed to moulder away.

Less than a year had passed since the death of the old Queen, and the old King was fading painlessly out of existence; yet the Regent decreed that the summer of 1819 should be a gay one. On July 15 he gave a fancy dress ball, at which "a number of young ladies appeared as haymakers, with very small hats on the back of their heads", and the Duchess of Kent appeared as — Joan of Arc. It can hardly be doubted that it was at the suggestion of the Duke that this handsome, matronly lady assumed a character so inappropriate. It was a juncture at which he would contemplate with satisfaction the image of a Female at once as celebrated and as virtuous as the Maid. Unfortunately no description of the costume seems to have survived, but with the aid of contemporary theatrical prints it is not impossible to imagine what it was like. The Duchess's dark ringlets would escape beneath a silvered helmet of the shape favoured by Britannia. Plumes, white or crimson, would nod on the top. From a glittering breastplate, skilfully moulded to the full curves of her figure, a blue petticoat would descend discreetly to the middle of the calf — or even lower. As much of the leg as modesty permitted to be seen would be sheathed in greaves of tin; and it is highly probable that when she made her entry, though not while dancing, she carried a lance of lath in her hand. The Prince Regent was no more fitted than anyone else at that period to perceive

the absurdity of these trappings, but he had sufficient judgment and sufficient humour to realize the incongruity of the character chosen, for which he would not unjustly blame his brother Edward.

Two days later the Duchess's knowledge of the English language and literature was further expanded by a performance of *Hamlet* at Covent Garden. This was followed by "an indescribable farrago falsely called *Mother Goose* but in fact scarcely bearing any resemblance to that justly popular pantomime". Meanwhile the infant Princess was thriving, her health unimpaired by the frequent and prolonged absences of her Mamma.

The character of the Duchess of Kent was at no time either subtle or profound, but during ten years of her second widowhood it underwent a change so curious that it may not be without interest to look back at her as she appeared in the last months of her second marriage. A buxom figure, beaming affably beneath highly-coloured plumes, she betrayed no trace of that hard streak of arrogance brought to the surface by the influence of Conroy. "Edward's dear, good little wife", Princess Augusta called her, affectionately rather than accurately, for according to the average feminine height of the period the Duchess was tall rather than short; but a diminutive is usually an endearment. The same Princess noted sadly a few months later that "she quite adored poor Edward, and they were truly blessed in each other".

They were; and there is something pathetic in this brief, belated idyll of two elderly people, brought together by policy and artlessly well-pleased with each other. After the Duke's death the Duchess wrote some notes in a little book expressing longing to be reunited to him. "*Such* love and affection! I hardly knew it was to *that* extent," was Queen Victoria's comment when she discovered this book among her mother's private papers.

The Duchess certainly accepted all her husband's opinions, by which she was later to regulate her conduct with sometimes unfortunate results. She adopted his distrustful, aggrieved attitude towards the Head of the Family; she was ready to smile upon the most repellent reformers, the most uncouth Radicals, the most exuberant Irishmen. She was even willing at the Duke's behest to spend some months with him at the model settlement of Robert Owen at New Lanark — a bleak prospect, as even Mr. Owen himself appears to have realized. But the Duke waved aside the doubts of his would-be host with courteous alacrity, and if death had not brought the scheme to naught, the Duchess would have had to take her baby, her pet birds, and her lapdogs into temporary exile among "the blameless Hyperboreans".

While they were still in the gayer air of London she and the Duke continued to be gay; and on August 6 they patronized another *rive-gauche* theatre, this time the Surrey, where they witnessed a spirited performance of *The Abbot of San Martino*, followed by *The Siege of Troy*, described as "a highly popular and entirely new epic mélange". Later in the same month they went to Sadler's Wells to see Grimaldi in a harlequinade entitled *The Fates*. An age which turned *Don Quixote* into a "serio-comic ballet" and *The Siege of Troy* into an "epic mélange" would see nothing strange in making the three fatal sisters a peg on which to hang a performance by one of the greatest of all clowns. In the interim the Duchess of Kent had celebrated her second English birthday, in a more cheerful and homely manner than the first. At 6.30 A.M., while she and the Duke were still inside their bed-curtains, Princess Feodore, her music-master, and the whole domestic staff sang *God Save the King* in the adjoining room. It showed a singular lack of initiative and imagination on the part of the English people at

this period to sing the national anthem on all possible occasions. With the King, blind and demented, dying slowly at Windsor, the associations of the tune were hardly encouraging, and the words were almost ironical. Yet it was with *God Save the King* that his daughter-in-law of Kent was greeted at Kensington, and with *God Save the King* that her brother Leopold was the same summer saluted in Edinburgh.

On the evening of August 17 the Duke of Kent gave a dinner-party at the Palace, and after dinner the company adjourned to the apartments of the Duke of Sussex to listen to a concert " under the direction of Sir George Smart, who presided at the pianoforte ".

It must have been about this time that the Duke and Duchess took their infant daughter to a review on Hounslow Heath, thereby drawing upon their heads a rebuke from the Prince Regent, who wanted to know what business that infant had there, and expressed a hope that he might never see her again on such a public occasion. A fortune-teller plying her craft on the Heath persuaded the Duke to let her look at his hand, and told him that there would be two deaths in his family in the following year. He heard her without emotion. One death would be that of the old King. As for the other — well, the Regent's health was not over-good, and the Duchess of York had long been ailing. As for the Regent's attitude to his niece, it could be explained if not excused, in several ways. As a possible inheritor of his " barren sceptre ", she would be as unacceptable to her uncle as she would be consoling to her father's creditors. But, bearing all the circumstances in mind, it still seems odd that the man who lavished affection on Minney Seymour, Mrs. Fitzherbert's adopted child, should have had none to spare for the pleasantly blooming sprig of his own royal stem.

On August 30 the whole Kent family, including Spaeth

and Feodore, went to visit the Princesses Augusta and Sophia at Windsor. The two affectionate ladies received their niece with joy. " Little angel George " of Cambridge they had not yet seen, but they must have realized that Princess Victoria was dynastically more important than any Cambridge or Cumberland infant. The Duchess of Clarence was again pregnant, and the Duke was planning their early return to England, but their first essay in parenthood had not been promising.

Concerning the Windsor visit Princess Mary wrote to the Regent :

> The Kents passed two nights at Windsor, bag and baggage — I mean that besides the baby she brought her daughter, and Mlle de Spate — and they *all retired to rest* both evenings at 9 o'clock, the Duke and Dss of Kent, Baby, Nurse, the Pss Fedora, and Mdlle de Spate *all* wished them good Night at the same time, and actually *went to bed* to the very great amusement of the whole society at Windsor.

This excess of virtue may perhaps have been intended to compensate the Duchess for the late nights in London, but it is a little difficult to understand why the Duke also should have donned his nightcap at such an early hour, and the grotesque analogy of the *couvade* suggests itself once more. On the other hand nine o'clock was a tardy bedtime for a young lady only three months of age.

In the meanwhile Mrs. John Conroy, the wife of the Duke's equerry, had given birth at Shooter's Hill to a daughter, who received in baptism the French form of her godmother's three Christian names, Victoire Marie Louise. This was the child destined to be the youthful Victoria's stable-companion until in 1837 the tempest of the new Queen's unforgetting anger struck down the whole Conroy family at one blow. The Duchess, however, continued to take an affectionate interest in her goddaughter and to

correspond regularly with her up to the time of her own death, which preceded Victoire's by only five years.

During the brief absence of the Kents from London Mr. Nash went to Kensington to inspect the apartments occupied by the Dukes of Kent and Sussex, which were " much out of repair ". Several royal personages about that time seem to have had their roofs tumbling about their ears, for the large tower at Windsor of which the principal apartments had till recently been occupied by the Princess Augusta was then being " taken down in consequence of its decayed state ". On their return to London Their Royal Highnesses viewed Mr. Birch's trivector, " which had previously performed the journey to Brighton ". It was worked, we are told, by three men, and made the round of the garden in seventeen minutes. The Princess Feodore, with Lehzen and Dr. Wilson, walked in the garden while the ponderous machine was clattering on its way.

Four days later the Clarences arrived in London. Poor Adelaide had had a miscarriage at Calais on the way home, and was once more cheated of " the happy moment which ", her husband had trusted in God, " would make her a mother ". Well might he call her " this superior-minded Princess "—disappointment left her character unwarped, even when she was confronted with the spectacle of the Duchess of Kent's triumphant motherhood. The two Duchesses soon resumed the constant intercourse interrupted by absence from England, and Adelaide took at once to her heart the baby girl whose constitution was so much more sound than her own baby's had been. " My children", she wrote, " are dead, but yours lives and she is mine also." The science of eugenics was as yet unborn, and it would occur only to the very shrewd and knowledgeable that the Kent stock was better to breed from than the Clarence. At fifty-two years of age the younger brother was a model of

well-preserved health. Four months later his Nonconformist friend Dr. Collyer thus summed up his physical condition in the strange words of the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Job :

> Royal Edward died " in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet ; his breasts were full of milk,[1] and his bones moistened with marrow ". Time had not impaired a constitution so hale, nor years furrowed the noble countenance.

This being so, it was hardly surprising that the Duke should have been the father of an exceptionally fine infant, " the May-blossom ", as her maternal grandmother called her, the child whose round blue eyes, soft film of golden hair, and clear rose-and-snow complexion recalled that fair colouring which Gainsborough had admired so much in the children of George III and Queen Charlotte. And already her facial angle was that of the poor grandfather who was unconscious of her very existence. The pretty legend that the baby's hand was placed in that of the old King, and " reminded him of Amelia's ", is probably apocryphal. By that time he could hardly have felt the hand of Victoria, much less spoken the name of Amelia. Apocryphal too is the story that when the Kents left London for Sidmouth later in the year the move was made unobtrusively in order to elude the Duke's creditors. As early as October 13 the newspapers announced that they intended to pass part of the autumn there, and that a house " was selecting " for their reception. A month later they were still in London, and on November 4 the Duchess took her baby to visit the Duke and Duchess of Clarence at Clarence House, St. James's. The visit was returned on the 19th, when Prince Leopold also paid his respects to his sister. Everyone knew by this time that the Kent family were shortly transferring themselves to Devonshire, and the Duke took care to let it

[1] The commentators add " or of milk-pails ".

be known further that lack of cordiality in certain high quarters, as well as " the unwearied solicitude with which she fulfilled her maternal duties ", had adversely affected the health of the Duchess. " We intend ", he wrote, " wintering in the West in order that the Duchess may have the benefit of tepid sea-bathing and our infant that of sea-air."

There may be some truth in the suggestion that it was Captain Conroy who urged the charms of Sidmouth upon the Duke. Himself an Irishman born in Wales, he seems always to have liked mild, relaxing climates, for he later chose to live successively at Osborne in the Isle of Wight and Arborfield, near Reading. Mrs. Conroy does not seem to have formed one of the royal party. She was a delicate, hypochondriacal person, and she, too, had an infant daughter on her hands that year.

The Regent did not conceal his anxiety that the Kent family should at the earliest possible moment betake themselves to some place much more remote from London than Sidmouth, and his sentiments towards his brother became noticeably less fraternal as the autumn merged into winter. The brilliant company gathered in Portland Place for the Spanish Ambassador's fête in December were edified by an open demonstration of these sentiments. It was a dazzling occasion, and the underworld of London sought to profit by so rare an opportunity to plunder the nobs. Bow Street runners, in their robin-redbreast waistcoats, proved quite unable to stem the tide of pickpockets which " beset the doors and endeavoured to rob amidst the confusion and alarm which they created ". The military were summoned, but it was some time before they marched up the broad roadway at the top of which the Duke of Kent's bust now stands whiskered and ineffable. Such of His Excellency's guests as had managed to thrust a path through the Seven Dials mob had the pleasure of seeing the Prince Regent

bow low over the Duchess of Kent's hand and then " take not the slightest notice of the Duke ". Wellington, wearing the costume of a Grandee of Spain, was of the company when "the Corporal" received this rebuff, and it is improbable that it caused His Grace any pain.

When the later conduct of the Duchess of Kent is considered, these slights paid to her husband by the Head of the Royal Family ought not to be forgotten. She " quite adored " her Duke, and every incident of this kind supported his assertion that he was unfairly used. Could she hope for any better treatment from the brothers who had dealt so ill by him ? During these last weeks in England the foundations were laid of that distrust and fear of the Regent which Conroy was to foster until it extended even to the guiltless William IV.

A house had been found at Sidmouth, and the Kents, leaving London in a black and bitter frost, may well have looked forward to the milder air of Devon.

The manor of Sidmouth had been part of the dower of Gytha, the mother of Harold, but there its royal associations ended until at the turn of the century a few ' fashionables ' bought villas in the neighbourhood. Among these was Lord Gwydyr, who had entertained the Regent as Prince of Wales, and General Baynes, whose unassuming two-storeyed dwelling, Woolbrook Cottage, was the place chosen to house the Duke and Duchess and their suite. As the " Clergyman, late of Oxford " neatly expressed it :

> Britannia smiled o'er the paradise scene,
> And to Sidmouth's soft vale the Family bore.

Westward-bound they halted at Windsor, where the aunts admired the fatness of the baby, and at Salisbury, where Dr. Fisher was for once in residence, and where the chapter had the honour of contemplating the six-month-old

Princess. She was a lively child, and the rather riotous Irish humour of the Bishop's nephew, Captain Conroy, must have been tickled when her small, prehensile hands twitched off his lordship's powdered grey wig. The Duke of Kent took the opportunity of inspecting the cathedral, and it may well be that the chill which he caught when pacing the deathly-cold aisles was the precursor of the pneumonia which caused his death a month later.

Standing in a thoroughly unhealthy situation, on the banks of a stream and at the bottom of a densely wooded glen, Woolbrook Cottage bore on its whitewashed exterior the marks of the Romantic Revival. Its windows were topped with incongruous pointed arches and filled with diamond-shaped panes ; it was partially embattled in a style reminiscent of Horace Walpole's pie-crust castle at Strawberry Hill. Inside it is said to have been ' musty ', and it cannot have been anything but mean. Even if the Duke's equerry, Captain Conroy, and his personal physician, Dr. Wilson, were lodged elsewhere in the little town, the rest of the party must have led a comfortless and congested life. Spaeth was there, in attendance on the Duchess ; Mrs. Brock, in charge of the baby ; Lehzen, continuing the education of Feodore. If the cottage had been bought instead of rented, the Duke would undoubtedly have summoned hordes of carpenters and bricklayers ; but it hardly seemed worth while, as the return to Amorbach could not be deferred beyond the end of April, and the visit to New Lanark was to be paid in the interim.

After a time the frost broke, and the characteristic climate of Sidmouth, humid and soft, made walks on the promenade possible, even if the sea were not tepid enough to permit the Duchess to bathe. Admiring strangers gathered round, and found themselves condescendingly addressed by the Duke, who invited them to draw near and see the infant Princess

better. He even, in a Micawber-like burst of confidence, informed them that living in a lowly cottage he was the happiest of men. Happy or not, the persecution complex persisted, for he wrote to a friend, " My little girl thrives under the influence of a Devonshire climate and is, I am delighted to say, strong and healthy : *too healthy*, I fear, in the opinion of some members of my family, by whom she was regarded as an intruder ".

What members of his family can the Duke have had in mind ? The Regent could hardly regard the child of his fourth brother as an intruder ; York and Sussex were not personally concerned ; William — and, even more than William, Adelaide — showed no signs of pique ; Cumberland — *there* was the most likely member, for Cumberland had a son now, and failing issue to all the elder brothers, that son would inherit the throne and maintain the link with Hanover. It is significant that the Duchess of Kent was later very nervous of Cumberland, not without good reason.

The Duke's desire that his daughter " should from her earliest years be educated in the language and customs of the country " found no echo in the mind of the Prince Regent, and the men who were wise enough to appreciate his wisdom could do nothing to help him. Early in January 1820, he mentioned in a letter to Mr. James Millar, of the British and Foreign School Society, that he and the Duchess were going to Amorbach to pay what he hopefully called their annual visit ; but about the same time he wrote in a more realistic mood to Dr. Budge, that " on account of the Duchess's duties as guardian of her two children and Regent of the principality ", they could not avoid going towards the end of April, and gave no hint of an early return. When he married the Princess Regent of Leiningen he must have been perfectly well aware that her duties would entail occasional absences abroad, but what he probably dreamed of

was a Parliamentary grant which would enable him to make his home mainly in England, and now, if only for the moment, he had to admit defeat.

It was an agitating New Year for the Duchess. The old year had closed with the narrow escape of her baby from a shot fired by " an apprentice-boy shooting at small birds ". 1820 began in an atmosphere of apprehension. And economy was still so stringent a necessity that the Duke felt unable to engage the service of a wet nurse when the health of the Duchess showed signs of strain. He was evidently not impatient for a second pregnancy, otherwise he might have thought that the chance of fathering a Prince would be well worth the wages of a wet nurse for the Princess.

The Duchess soon rallied. Neither inclement weather nor a relaxing climate could much abate her vitality. And the Duke, in the intervals of writing or dictating interminable letters on an immense variety of subjects, went for long walks with Captain Conroy. The Irish equerry was steadily advancing in royal favour.

It was a bitter winter. The ice below Kew Bridge was more than a foot and a half thick, and at Windsor the difficulty of keeping the old King warm became increasingly great. In Devonshire the air was heavy with a chilling mist, which did not deter the Duke and Conroy from striding forth for their regular constitutional. They were an imposing pair, both over six feet in height, and one of them more than commonly handsome. What tastes they had in common — politics, farming, military matters — were the sort of tastes which make men good company for each other.

From one of these long walks the Duke returned with his boots soaked through. Conroy, whose own boots were in the same case, urged him to go straight upstairs and

change. But the suggestion passed unheeded until the Duke dressed for dinner, " being attracted by the smiles of his infant Princess, with whom he sat for a considerable time in fond parental endearment ". Later in the evening he felt chilly and complained of hoarseness, and Dr. Wilson prescribed a draught " composed of calomel and James's powder ".

James's Powder was the aspirin of the eighteenth century. It was given to the dying Goldsmith and the delirious George III. Horace Walpole's faith in it was so fervent that he once remarked that if he heard the house was on fire the first thing he would do would be to take James's Powder; and when his charming friend Molly Lepell, Lady Hervey, was taken ill with " an inflammation on the breast ", she would swallow no other medicine. Less credulous, the Duke waved away Dr. Wilson's potion, declaring that " he had little doubt a night's rest would carry off any uneasy symptom ". But night brought no rest with it, and by the dim light of the *veilleuse* the Duchess would see the face of the Duke congested and contracted by uneasy breathing and mounting fever. When morning came, Dr. Wilson was seriously alarmed.

It was not the first time that the Duchess had had to deal with an ailing husband, and she rose stoutly to the occasion. Dr. Wilson ordered leeches, and she herself applied them to the Duke's temples. He brewed fresh potions, and standing over the patient she saw to it that they were not waved away. But the doctor's uneasiness communicated itself to her, and she sent an express message to London saying that she was " greatly alarmed ", and requesting Sir David Dundas to go down immediately to Sidmouth. The request placed Sir David in a rather awkward position. He was due to take his turn with the other royal physicians in looking after the King, and he could not very well desert his post at

Windsor ; on the other hand, neither as a doctor nor as a courtier was he willing to reject so earnest an appeal from so illustrious a quarter. So he took counsel with Princess Augusta, driving down from London on purpose, and praying that he might speak to her " upon particular business ". The Princess advised him to send in his stead " some other person of whose skill he was confident ", and he decided to send Dr. Maton, a well-known medico who lived in Spring Gardens. Maton, wrote the Princess to Lady Harcourt, " was very discreet and at the same time very *bold*, both of which qualities were very necessary with such sort of colds as poor Edward's always were ".

Dundas's deputy made a good impression at Woolbrook Cottage. " Nous sommes bien aise ", wrote the Duchess to her sister-in-law, " d'avoir le Docteur Maton, il approuve de tout que le bon Wilson a fait ; mais, chère Princesse, croyez moi que votre Frère est bien malade, et il ne peut pas supporter le moindre bruit sans *délire*."

Does thy Edward, Louisa, bend lowly his head,
Does disorder enfeeble his strong, manly frame ?
Ah ! thy anguish I feel while attending his bed,
For Charlotte thy Leopold, too, felt the same !

Once more it is the " Clergyman, late of Oxford " who speaks. Why he should have apostrophized the Duchess as ' Louisa ' is obscure. There is no hint anywhere that she was ever addressed by any but the first of her three Christian names.

During that distressful week Feodore was praying passionately that her stepfather might be spared, but the Duchess had little time for prayer. Still dressed in the morning gown which she had put on five days before, she remained by the Duke's bed, ministering to him with ready hands, and trying to calm his wandering mind. It was kind as well as tactful of Dr. Maton to approve of all that Dr.

Wilson had done; but later, in private conversations, he was heard to remark that if he had been in attendance during the early stages of the disorder he thought he would have bled the Duke more freely. A hundred and twenty ounces of blood were taken from him; but, declared Maton, "he would have borne more depletion".

The news of the Duke's danger soon spread, and on January 17 the Duke of Sussex arrived at Sidmouth. Prince Leopold, who had been up in Scotland staying with Lord Lauderdale [1] when the illness began, was already hastening south through the bitter cold, a journey which he remembered with a shudder all his life. The Duke's Comptroller and old friend, General Wetherall, joined the anxious group; and in the background was the unobtrusive, undistinguished figure of Stockmar, of whom it might well have been said, as Charles II said of Sidney Godolphin, that "he was never in the way and never out of the way".

A junta consisting of Leopold, Stockmar, Wetherall, and Conroy now devoted their attention to the question of the Duke's Will. He had made none when he married, and prompt action was necessary if his widow and daughter were not to become subject to Carlton House rule, to the exclusion of all Coburg influences. Too late the Regent awoke to the uncomfortable potentialities of the position. If Edward should die, if the Clarences should fail to provide an heir to the throne, what an opportunity there would be for further Coburg penetration! One guardian — or possibly more — must of course be chosen for the infant Princess, and he hoped that Edward would have sufficiently correct feeling to name the Head of the Family as one — if not the only one. With a reminder of the desirability of settling this matter without delay, he sent an affectionate

[1] He himself, in a letter to Queen Victoria, said "in Berkshire", but a contemporary authority says "Scotland".

message to his brother. Kent was touched. There had been a time when all the Princes had looked up with admiration at their brilliant senior, and it may have been a sudden remembrance of that time which made him rouse himself to ask after the Regent's health and then to say feebly, " If I could now shake hands with him, I should die in peace ".

It was Wetherall whose voice recalled the Duke's wandering mind when the moment came to get the Will read and endorsed. Who had written it is uncertain, but it may have been Conroy; and, if so, it would embody instructions received by him during those long royal promenades. It appointed the testator's beloved wife sole guardian of their dear child; and, " under a confident hope that his just claims on the Government would yet be considered for the purpose of liquidating his debts ", he gave, devised, and bequeathed unto Frederick Augustus Wetherall, Lieutenant-General in the Army, all and every his real and personal estates of whatever nature upon trust, and for the entire use and benefit of his said beloved wife and dear child. Wetherall and Conroy were the executors.

" Gathering together all his strength ", says Stockmar, the Duke prepared to sign the Will, after hearing it read over twice. " With difficulty he wrote ' Edward ' below it, looked attentively at each separate letter, and asked if the signature was clear and legible." Being assured that it was, he sank back on the pillows, and the severe death-struggle of a vigorous man went on. Articulate speech was difficult, but he was heard to mutter a prayer that the Almighty might protect his wife and child, and forgive all the sins he had committed. A few minutes before the end he opened his eyes and fixed them upon the face of the Duchess, wan in the grey light of the January morning. " Do not," he said earnestly, " do not forget me."

The repeater-watch in the tortoiseshell case on the bed-

side table struck ten with a clear, melodious sound. As the vibrations died away, his laboured breathing ceased. Then the black-clad figure of Prince Leopold detached itself from the shadows round the bed and led the exhausted Duchess from the room.

CHAPTER V

WIDOWHOOD

> Invidious Grave! How thou dost rend in sunder
> Whom love hath knit and sympathy made one!
>
> BLAIR

> Two objects of especial sympathy present themselves — the one, that Prince upon whom the first stroke descended . . . the other, his widowed sister, who sits alone and desolate, almost a stranger in a strange land, yet holding in her hand the pledge of her departed consort's affection and of a nation's hopes.
>
> *The Double Bereavement*

THE news of the Duke of Kent's death was received with a mixture of feelings among which a sort of incredulous astonishment predominated. It seemed impossible that this large, vigorous, voluble figure should thus suddenly have been obliterated. The kind Princesses overflowed. "Thank God, Edward died easy", exclaimed Princess Mary, "and sent his love to all his family!" "Think of it, dearest Lady Harcourt," wrote Princess Augusta, "that yesterday five weeks he was here on his way to Sidmouth, so happy with his excellent, good little wife and his lovely child!" It was indeed a solemn thought, and gave rise to many reflections quite in the Duke's own vein. Speakers and preachers all over England dwelt with gloomy eloquence upon the manner in which his widow and her brother had suffered "under the mysterious dispensations of Providence". His creditors might have taken comfort if they had known that such of them as would be alive eighteen years later

were to receive full payment of his debts, with accumulated interest, from the daughter then playing with her coral and bells at Woolbrook Cottage ; but in the meantime his death had gravely increased the difficulties of the Duchess, who had not sufficient funds in hand to meet the expenses of the return to London. She hastily borrowed £12,000 " for her outfit ".

Public interest in the event extended even to the question as to whether Messrs. France and Banting, undertakers, or Messrs. Bailey and Saunders, cabinetmakers and upholsterers, should have the honour of providing the huge coffin ; and only two days after His Royal Highness departed this life an enterprising *costumière* inserted the following notice in *The Times* :

> The death of the Duke of Kent cannot be too much lamented. He was a great and good man. Mrs. Bell begs leave to state that she is preparing and will have ready immediately the Mourning suitable to the Occasion, consisting of Walking, Morning and Evening Dresses, Pelisses, Spencers, bonnets, caps etc : 52, St. James's Street.

The Duchess, draped for the second time in black bombazine and crape, gave an edifying example of resignation. " She has ", wrote Princess Augusta, " conducted herself like an angel, and I am thankful dearest Leopold was with her." There was cause for thankfulness. Gruesome things were happening at Sidmouth, where the medical gentlemen performed a post-mortem and marvelled at the prodigious bulk and strength of the dead Prince. Afterwards the seven-foot coffin lay in state, shaded by plumes, covered with a rich velvet pall, and surrounded by thirty wax candles. In so small a house there can have been no room far enough from the *chapelle ardente* for the shuffling of respectful feet to be inaudible in it, and etiquette demanded that the widow should remain in seclusion till after the funeral. They were

trying days for the Duchess, and to add to her distress the baby also was suffering from a cold.

It was perhaps natural that her first impulse should have been to return to Amorbach and settle there, with all her three children. If her baby should in a few years move into the place of Heiress Presumptive to the English throne, Parliament might be expected to take appropriate steps; but Parliament had so far failed to justify the Duke's confidence, and beyond passing decorous resolutions of sympathy had shown little disposition to be helpful. She had done her best. She had studied English; she had inspected schools, prisons, arsenals, and useful inventions; she had shown herself abroad, on her husband's arm, and smiled upon the multitude from the royal box. She had been affable to Radicals, and had agreed to stay with Robert Owen in Scotland. And her reward? Not slight, indeed. The Duke's approval; the admiration of the Woods, the Wilberforces, the Allens, the O'Connells, and the Collyers; gushing paragraphs in the popular press; waving handkerchiefs and agitated top-hats wherever she went. But against this had to be set the frigid attitude of the Regent and his friends, and the absolute dearth of funds from any source whatever, beyond her jointure of £3oo a year. Never can Amorbach have seemed more delightful.

At this juncture Prince Leopold intervened, with his usual cool prescience. He felt little doubt as to the destiny of his niece, and he was prepared to back his belief with solid cash. Let the Duchess return to Kensington; he would pay the expenses of the journey. Let her remain in England; he would make her an allowance of £3000 a year. But let her not, by returning to the Continent, throw away all that had been gained of popular affection, and loosen the bonds between the English people and their future sovereign. He was able to support his arguments

out of the mouth of her dead husband, and it is hardly surprising that she should have capitulated. Yet before she could even return to her shabby suite at Kensington the permission of the Prince Regent had to be obtained; and before there was time to ask it the old King had died and the reign of George IV had begun.

It was a little unfortunate for the milliners and mantua-makers that the Duke of Kent's father should have outlived him only six days, thus making it possible for one suit of sables to do duty for two royal deaths; but it was a circumtance which gave preachers and leader-writers a magnificent opportunity, and they were not slow to seize it. Dr. Collyer, of the Hanover Chapel, Peckham, preaching a funeral sermon for his illustrious friend, delivered himself to this effect:

> Intelligence has just arrived that his Royal Father has joined those of his departed Family in the eternal world. . . . Presumptuous as it may be, one can scarcely avoid imagining what was his [George III's] surprise and gratification . . . when he met on the shores of eternity not merely his long-lost and lamented child [Princess Amelia], but the granddaughter whose mind he delighted to train in the paths of piety . . . that Princess who had been so many years and up to the last moment of his intellectual being the Partner of his joys and sorrows — and, last but not least, the Son who had never cost him a Tear.

The fact that owing to the loss of his reason the King was unaware of the deaths of Princess Charlotte, Queen Charlotte, and the Duke of Kent could not well have been conveyed in a more delicate manner; but the worthy Doctor can have known little or nothing at first hand about the private affairs of the Family. It may have been true that George III never wept, though he sometimes frowned, over the conduct of his fourth son; but it is certain that the Duke himself was conscious of a strange lack of appreciation in that quarter. Dr. Collyer's picture of a surprised

and gratified monarch being met at his place of disembarkation by relatives who he did not know had predeceased him has its perfect counterpoise in Byron's *Vision of Judgment*:

> All I saw further in the last confusion
> Was that King George slipped into heaven for one;
> And when the tumult dwindled to a calm,
> I left him practising the Hundredth Psalm.

Even more preposterous than Dr. Collyer's sermon was the versified panegyric, *Britannia's Tears*, described by its author as "a hasty effusion of the heart", and rather wildly dedicated to "Louisa Maria, Duchess of Kent". Here we trace an idea not dissimilar to that of Dr. Collyer, but the medium employed heightens the absurdity:

> To brighter Realms still his shade we pursue,
> And friends more endear'd and glorious we hail,
> His Sire and his niece their rapture renew,
> And joy over sorrow for ever prevail!

Then, unlike his Nonconformist brother, the "Clergyman, late of Oxford" brings the widowed Duchess into the picture:

> There, Louisa, mayst thou thy dear Edward rejoin,
> When late in the evening thy spirit ascends,
> Then a bliss far exceeding renew'd will be thine
> Which for Time's dreary loss will make ample amends!

At Sidmouth a decision was now taken which was destined powerfully to affect the course of events up to 1840, when Queen Victoria's marriage brought with it a tardy but complete reconciliation between herself and her mother. Prince Leopold has been given, and, indeed, deserves much credit for the part he played, and Stockmar has received his due; but there was a third counsellor at Woolbrook Cottage whose voice, however unassumingly,

would be joined with theirs. It was a persuasive Irish voice, and belonged to Captain Conroy.

With the gambling instinct of his race Conroy was betting on the Duchess as a possible Regent on behalf of her small daughter. If the time he foresaw should ultimately come, she would need a confidential servant by whose judgment she could be guided, and upon whose devotion she could rely. And then to whom would she be more likely to turn than to the companion of the Duke's last days, the faithful equerry who had urged him in vain to change his wet boots, the man whom he had chosen as one of the executors of his last Will? And beyond a gracious Regent might appear a grateful sovereign. As Kent's star set, Conroy's began to rise.

It was, rather curiously, to Princess Mary, Duchess of Gloucester, and not to Princess Augusta that Prince Leopold had recourse in order to obtain the new King's permission for the widow and baby to return to Kensington Palace. Princess Mary exerted herself nobly. She poured forth appeals in her large, illegible hand, and whether George IV read them or not, he acted upon them. On a cold January morning a group of loyal people gathered round the gates of Woolbrook Cottage to watch the departure of the Duchess. As the travelling-carriage swung out into the road they caught a glimpse of a heavily veiled figure holding up a small white bundle for them to see. When they saw it, loud cries arose, and mingled blessings and farewells floated on the frosty air. One by one the carriages rattled past, with the black cockades on the harness and the black fringes on the hammercloths adding to the note of woe struck by the deep mourning worn alike by the postillions and their passengers. Many of the spectators would at once recognize the handsome aquiline features of one of the gentlemen in the suite. "That", they would say, "is Captain Conroy

— the Duke's equerry — the same that went with him on that last walk to Point Hill."

The Duchess of Gloucester saw her widowed sister-in-law on the way back to Kensington, and found her "a Picture of Resignation and Piety"; Princess Augusta, in all her sorrow for her father, could not forget "that good, excellent woman, the Dutchess of Kent"; but it was the Duchess of Clarence to whom the poor lady turned for sympathy, and she did not turn in vain. "Dearest William", wrote Princess Augusta, "is so good-hearted that he has desired Adelaide to go to Kensington every day, as she is such a comfort to the poor Widow, and her sweet gentle mind is of great use to the Duchess of Kent." Together the two exiles read prayers in their native German. It made them, remarked the kind Augusta, "such real friends and comforts to each other". And together they watched the infant Victoria crawling upon the bright-yellow carpet, or playing with a miniature of the Duke of Kent.

They were both at the house of the Duchess of Gloucester on that August morning of the same year when Harriet, Countess Granville, was of the party. The Duchess of Clarence, though ugly, had, said Lady Granville, "a good *tournure* and manner"; the Duchess of Kent she found "very pleasing indeed, and raving of her baby. '*C'est mon bonheur, mes délices, mon existence. C'est l'image du feu roi!*'"

That Adelaide's *tournure* should have been commended speaks well for the skill of her dressmaker, for she was then five months pregnant, and in December the baby girl was born who for four months stood between the Princess of Kent and the throne of England. This time the King seems to have been less obstructive over the names chosen, for the child was christened 'Elizabeth Georgiana Adelaide'. There was one person to whom her birth and survival

caused no satisfaction: Captain John Conroy. "We are all", he wrote, "on the kick and go. Our little woman's nose has been put out of joint." But before Princess Victoria's first birthday dawned her Clarence cousin had been buried in the royal vault at Windsor. Public sympathy with the father and mother would have been greater if public attention had not been at that time distracted by the pranks of Queen Caroline.

The ruffed and farthingaled babies upon Tudor tombs have their own pathos, but there is something even more touching in the marble image of the baby Princess Elizabeth which, in fulfilment of the promise made by Queen Victoria to Queen Adelaide, is still preserved at Windsor. She lies easily, as if asleep, her eyes closed and her head inclined towards her right shoulder. One knee is flexed, and one bare dimpled foot escapes from the loose draperies moulding her small body. Looking at her, it is impossible not to wonder whether, but for early nineteenth-century ignorance of nursery hygiene, she might not have lived to wear the crown, and to give the name of 'Elizabethan' to a second great epoch in English history.

The first years of the Duchess of Kent's widowhood were spent in comparative obscurity between Kensington and Claremont, with occasional visits to Ramsgate, Tunbridge Wells, or some other suitable resort; but from the very outset she began to cultivate the acquaintance of serious men of the type favoured by her dead Duke. Only seven months after his death she invited William Wilberforce, her neighbour in Kensington Gore, to wait upon her one morning. The great abolitionist wrote an account of his impressions to Hannah More, who, having drawn up a scheme for the education of Princess Charlotte, would no doubt have dearly loved to perform the same office for the "fine animated child" whom he described crawling on the

floor with its playthings. The Duchess received him very civilly, pleased, no doubt, by the " pretty expression " and the " beautiful voice " which Melbourne later praised to Queen Victoria ; but she did not think it necessary either to seat herself or to invite him to be seated during the quarter of an hour that the visit lasted, and, except when he bent down to disport himself with the baby, he remained standing. None the less, he found her manner " quite delightful " when she " spoke of her situation ", and was inclined to regret that the presence of " a female attendant and a gentleman " — probably Spaeth and Conroy — made " a continued discourse " impossible. After apologizing for her imperfect English and expressing a gracious hope that she might talk it longer and better with him at some future time, she closed the audience.

In the June of the following year Prince Leopold laid the foundation-stone of a new school, to be " conducted on the British and Foreign plan ", at Oxshott. The Duchess was present, and at her request it was called the Royal Kent School, as a reminder of the Duke's constant interest in the cause of education. Large crowds cheered as the royal arms were borne in procession through the village, and sympathetic glances followed the brother and sister as they drove away after the ceremony.

One of the Duke's precepts punctually reiterated by the Duchess's advisers was the importance of catching and holding that important organ known as the Public Eye. So loiterers by Palace Green were soon edified by the sight of the infant Victoria skipping along between her mother and her sister, holding a hand of each, and calling out " Good morning, Sir ", or " Good morning, lady ", to those who crowded nearest to the rails. It can hardly be doubted that it was the Duchess who encouraged this behaviour on the part of a child naturally friendly. By this time she was on

better terms with the Duke of York, who gave Victoria a donkey nearly as rotund as himself, and arranged a Punch and Judy show for her at the house of his friend Charles Greenwood in Brompton. She was also cultivating good relations with her tragic sister-in-law, Princess Sophia, then recently settled in her apartments at Kensington Palace, from which she seldom emerged unless to drive round the parks with Princess Mary, or walk in the grounds of Buckingham Palace, screened only by the trees from the upper windows of General Garth's house in Grosvenor Place. There was someone else who was cultivating this Princess — Captain Conroy, whose Irish gaiety sometimes enlivened her rather melancholy evenings, and whom we find frequenting her drawing-room in company as distinguished as Prince Leopold and the Dukes of Cumberland and Sussex.

During these years — 1820–28 — Prince Leopold was as constantly at his sister's elbow as his fairly frequent absences on the Continent allowed. She spent a great deal of time at Claremont, and her brother accompanied her " by steam " to Ramsgate when she took her child there to enjoy sea-bathing. The ascendancy which he acquired over her mind was so strong that it seemed as if nothing could vie with it ; but as the years passed he ceased to combat the influence of Conroy, quietly abandoned the rôle of brother, and began to study and rehearse that of uncle. Many years later the Prince Consort made an illuminating comment. " Mama here ", he wrote of his mother-in-law, " would never have fallen into the hands of Conroy if Uncle Leopold had taken the trouble to guide her." By insinuating this view into Victoria's mind he must have softened her sentiments towards her mother and hardened them towards her uncle.

At Kensington Palace life was following a course at once simple and eventless. Mamma had the child Victoria con-

stantly at her side, night and day. A small white bed stood beside the larger one, and there the Princess slept, lulled by the tick of the Duke's old repeater. In the morning they breakfasted together, in the garden when the weather was fine. Mr. Charles Knight, pausing on his way to Furnival's Inn, saw them, and thought that they formed "a group of exquisite loveliness". A single page attended on them "at a respectful distance", and "the matron looked on with eyes of love while the fair soft English face was bright with smiles". At lunch the child's place was laid beside her mother's, and she had a silver bowl of bread and milk while the grown-ups dined.

It has often been suggested that in dealing with her second daughter, the Duchess of Kent showed a repressive severity which drove the child into the arms of Lehzen and laid the foundations of that lack of sympathy between them which persisted right up to Victoria's marriage. On her own confession Victoria was a passionate-tempered child, slow and rather recalcitrant over her lessons, and prone to scream when her will was crossed; but it does not seem that Mamma believed in fierce punishments. The Duchess was in advance of the age which was always anxious not to spare the rod, and the methods she chose were solitary confinement or dismissal to Coventry. People then took little account of children's tears, and Victoria herself showed a Spartan spirit when her turn came. *À propos* of this there is an illuminating anecdote in a letter written by Lady Augusta Bruce in 1855, on an occasion when "poor Leo", the future Duke of Albany, had been in disgrace. "He was so young," pleaded the Duchess, "his passions will go off when he is six" — to wit, in four years' time. "Oh," said the Queen, "I don't know what we should do then — whip him well?" The Duchess thereupon remarked how sad it made her to hear a child cry. "It makes", she said,

"an impression." To which her daughter retorted with cheerful stoicism, "Not when you have eight, Mamma. That wears off." Nevertheless the Queen remembered after Mamma's death how wise and gentle a Grandmamma she had been. "It was dreadful," she then said, "to have the anxiety of the children's illness without being able to tell her. What would she have thought? Would she think we took enough care of them?"

It is not without interest that this tender-hearted Grandmamma should have mentioned six years old as an age at which childish passions were likely to "go off", for it was the age at which Lehzen took charge of Victoria, and began that quiet, steady system of discipline which in the end, without recourse to whipping, tamed that wayward and difficult temper so effectually.

In the notes which she jotted down in 1872 Queen Victoria states categorically that 1826 was the first year that George IV asked "the poor widow and the little fatherless girl to Windsor". An impression has thus been created that up to that time His Majesty ignored them both completely, but it was not so. In July 1823 the Duchess took her small daughter to Carlton House, to thank the King for his birthday present — a miniature of himself, set in brilliants. By some trick of memory the Queen transferred both the visit and the gift from London to Windsor, and from 1823 to 1826; but it does seem that His Majesty was inclined to hold aloof until the later date, though he had seen and admired Feodore before then.

In 1824 Lord Frederick FitzClarence confided to Mr. Creevey that George was getting "very old and cross"; that the Duchess of Clarence was "the best and most charming woman in the world"; that Prince Leopold was "a damned humbug"; and that he — Lord Frederick — "disliked the Duchess of Kent". Thus early began the

unfortunate enmity between that Duchess and those illegitimate children of the Duke of Clarence whom his wife found it in her heart not only to tolerate but to befriend.

The King's crossness cannot have been mitigated by the debate in the Commons a year later, when the question of increasing the Duchess of Kent's allowance was raised. Mr. Brougham took occasion to remark that the Duke of Kent's private virtues survived in his illustrious widow, who was most assiduous in doing that which a mother was best fitted to do, namely, superintending the education of the infant Princess. Canning, fresh from his second triumph over the *camarilla* at Windsor, said that all parties were agreed as to the propriety of the grant, and that "there could not be a greater compliment to her Royal Highness than to state the quiet, unobtrusive tenour of her life, and that she had never made herself the object of the public gaze" — a compliment which under Conroy's influence she ceased to deserve in the succeeding reign. Canning was inclined to harp on that string, for he also observed that he was sure that the subject of the discussion would be "as painful to the Duchess's feelings as it would be repugnant to that unobtrusive delicacy which had characterized her conduct, and which rendered her an ornament to her exalted station".

In 1826, however, the King was in a less peevish humour. His wretched wife had lain for four years in her German grave, and the dust of their conflict was beginning to settle. The rather ostentatious friendship between the Duchess of Kent and Caroline's former champions had lost some, at least, of its sting. And a new influence was now being exercised in her favour—the influence of Lady Conyngham, in whose matronly society the King was able for the last time in his curiously-ordered life to gratify his taste for middle-aged romance. Mrs. Fitzherbert, Lady Hertford, Lady Conyngham — they make a strange trio. The Duke

of Kent had cultivated the good-will of the first; his one-time equerry, Captain Conroy, was now cultivating the good-will of the last in the interests of the widowed Duchess. For what remained of the King's precarious life it was better that relations between Kensington Palace and Windsor should be good. And in the summer of 1826, probably at Lady Conyngham's suggestion, Victoria and her Mamma were formally invited to Windsor.

Even if the Duchess had jibbed at the invitation Conroy would have persuaded her to accept it. Propriety imposed no serious ban, for the most pious members of what the King called "the dear Sisterhood" tolerated without demur the constant presence at Royal Lodge of that lady whom Melbourne later described as the most rapacious of the King's mistresses. Lady Conyngham may have been rapacious and was certainly dull; but she was a good-natured woman when she was not thwarted, and Queen Victoria remembered her long afterwards with gratitude. Her children and grandchildren were much in evidence at Windsor, and the smaller fry among them helped to entertain the little Princess of Kent during that historic visit. It was her son who, as Lord Chamberlain, was to announce to that Princess eleven years later that William IV was dead and that she was Queen.

"Give me your little paw", said the old King, when the dumpy, fair-haired child in the plain white muslin frock stood before him. The Duchess of Kent, looking on, must have been pleased to see him bend down his face to be kissed, and it was well that Victoria kissed it obediently, for she remembered distastefully all her life the contact of her lips with that withered and painted cheek. Her own account of the occasion has often been quoted, and it is noteworthy that the name of her mother figures in it only once. This is when she is relating how while walking with Mamma and a



ASCOT FASHIONS
From a contemporary print
Rischgitz Studios

group of Conynghams towards Virginia Water, she encountered the King driving in his phaeton with the Duchess of Gloucester, and he said "Pop her in". More than fifty years later she could recollect being lifted in and placed between the two of them, with Aunt Gloucester's arm round her waist; and she added in a casual parenthesis "(Mamma was much frightened)".

Why should the Duchess have trembled? Man and boy, drunk and sober, George IV was an excellent whip. In his heyday he could handle the ribbons like any professional; and with what skill he piloted his own four-in-hand dwellers upon the road between London and Brighton well knew. Even at the age of sixty-five, asthmatic, obese, and within four years of his death, he could surely have been trusted to manage a pair of tractable ponies in a low-swung phaeton! Two possible explanations of Mamma's alarm suggest themselves. On the one hand she may have thought that a little exhibition of maternal sensibility might not be amiss; but there is nothing in any record of her life which points to hypocrisy. It seems more likely that, added to her natural, if exaggerated, solicitude, there was the realization, fostered by Conroy, that on the survival of Victoria depended all her hopes of power, authority, and wealth. However little the Duchess's Comptroller — as he now was — may have cared for the feelings of her whom he rather slightingly called "our little woman", he would be more concerned than anyone — except her mother — in the question of her ultimate succession to the throne. It may well have been at his suggestion that someone always held her hand when she went up or down the stairs.

The Dowager Duchess of Saxe-Coburg read an account of the visit to Virginia Water in the English newspapers, and wrote that the "little monkey", Victoria, must have "pleased and amused" her uncle, the King. The "bigger

monkey", Feodore, "was always", she added, "much in favour." The old lady came to England not long after, and Leopold went to meet her at Dover. They had many things to say to each other on the way to Claremont, views to exchange, gossip to barter, information to impart. In the house still pervaded by memories of Princess Charlotte, the Duchess of Kent, Feodore, and Victoria were waiting.

Mother and daughter had not met for more than six years, and the agitation of the moment infected the younger granddaughter when the travelling-carriage turned in between the two dismal white urns flanking the gates, bowled up the drive, and halted at the foot of the great flight of stone steps. The old lady, a little bent now, and needing the support of her son's arm, was assisted to alight. Not until the difficult ascent was over and she was ensconced in her own apartment did she fix her intense blue eyes upon Victoria and pronounce her verdict: "*Ein schönes Kind*".

Frenchified though the Coburgs were, they evidently reverted to their homelier mother tongue in moments of emotion; but Queen Victoria's record of this incident — made fifty years later — raises a rather interesting point.

In Agnes Strickland's suppressed biography, *Victoria from Birth to Bridal*, it was stated that the Princess spoke German with her mother, and a royal hand noted in pencil on the margin of the page, "Not true, never spoke German till '39. Not allowed." If German was "not allowed", how did the child know what her Grandmother's interjection meant? Of course it is possible that someone told her; but it seems improbable that either Mamma or Lehzen would have done this at the time. Talking it over many years later, one of them must have translated the old lady's words. She was an old lady of such strong personality that her eyes, her gait, and her sharp tongue remained unforgotten. But in what language did she scold her recalcitrant

grandchild with "a very salutary effect"? The scolding was administered when the Dowager Duchess and her daughter were sitting talking and the rebellious cries of Victoria were heard "from the next room but one". Mamma remained where she was; but Grandmamma came forth, leaning on her stick, and uttered severe admonitions, certainly not in English: perhaps in French? "Timidity" has sometimes been suggested as one of the reasons for the breach between mother and child, and the Duchess may have delegated too much authority to Lehzen simply because she felt herself unequal to coping with a temper at once fierce and stubborn.

There was another reason, besides the excitement of reunion with her mother, why the Duchess of Kent should be agitated when the travelling-carriage arrived at Claremont. Her son Charles, Prince of Leiningen, was of the party, and him also she had not seen for more than six years. He was her firstborn; he was now twenty-two, a lively, likeable youth, a typical Coburg in feature except for his blond colouring; and his grandmother had brought him with her to England at a moment when he was neither in her good graces nor likely to be in his mother's. The young man had fallen in love with one of the Dowager's ladies, Countess Klebelsberg, and he was determined to marry her.

What plans — if any — the Duchess of Kent had formed for her son we do not know; but the Coburgs were increasingly conscious of the importance of making good alliances, and the prospect of a dowerless German girl as a daughter-in-law did not appeal to Mamma in the least. Leopold, who had toyed two years earlier with the idea of becoming the first King of a free and independent Greece, was bound to agree with her. And the Dowager's visit to Claremont was chequered by arguments and expostulations. When, after a

stay of several months, she returned to Germany she took Feodore with her, and Lehzen was left free to give her undivided attention to the younger and more important sister.

It was an awkward moment for the governess to enter upon her duties. An epidemic of dysentery was raging in Esher, and the six-year-old Princess went down. The local doctor lost his own child, and his nerve failed. Once more it must have seemed to Captain Conroy that his luck was out. But a London apothecary called Blagden was summoned, " and showed much energy on the occasion ". One of his recommendations was that his royal patient should wear flannel next her skin, and when she felt that unfamiliar contact for the first time she " screamed dreadfully ", like poor Narcissa with her

Odious ! in woollen — 'twould a Saint provoke.

When Lehzen took over she found the child surrounded by adorers whose excesses Mamma did nothing to moderate. There was Spaeth in the first place, the faithful Spaeth, a living link with Coburg, where a kinsman of hers was Concert-Master. Her devotion to the Family, wrote Feodore many years later to Queen Victoria, " sometimes showed itself rather foolishly. With you it was always a sort of idolatry." Lehzen, who liked Spaeth, watched her kneeling as if in worship before the small Princess, and disapproved. Then there was Louisa Louis, who had been Princess Charlotte's dresser, and who now, old and doting, transferred to Charlotte's cousin all the devotion that she had once given to her. Mrs. Brock, the dry nurse, was still in evidence, and took part in the cult without winning the unqualified regard of its object. Again Lehzen stood aside and watched ; and again she disapproved. As soon as she felt sufficiently sure of herself and of her power, she intervened and " scolded

them nicely " ; it was, adds Feodore, in relating this, " quite amusing ".

When the Duchess of Kent died, her elder daughter wrote to her younger and confessed, " I was often jealous of you, and told dear Mamma she loved you more ". To this Mamma would rejoin, with " one of her sad smiles, ' *Feodore, versündige dich nicht ; ich liebe euch beide gleich* ' ". And no doubt she did. Yet it is significant that Queen Victoria was surprised as well as touched to find among her mother's papers little books with accounts of her babyhood, showing " such unbounded love and tenderness ". Either the Duchess was one of those parents whose affection dwindles in proportion to a child's growth, or during the period of Conroy's ascendancy her natural emotions were dissembled and repressed.

When Feodore returned to England after the visit to Grandmamma she was still "much in favour" with the old King, a connoisseur both of looks and breeding, though it seems incredible that he really thought at any time of making her his Queen. If he had done it, the curious position would have been created by which the widow of his little-liked brother Edward became his mother-in-law. It is possible, none the less, that there *was* some such preposterous idea floating in His Majesty's mind towards the year 1827, and that the sight of this enchantingly graceful girl made him dream dreams. What is certain is that about this time he created Lehzen a Hanoverian Baroness, either to mark his approval of the manner in which she had ' schooled ' Feodore, or to secure her good-will for himself. Victoria had been for so short a space in Lehzen's care that this sign of favour can hardly have been a reward for any services rendered to the Heiress Presumptive.

Everything points to a certain anxiety on the part of the Duchess of Kent to get her elder daughter ' settled ', and it

can hardly be doubted that Conroy encouraged her in this. Improbable though it was that a child would be born of any marriage contracted by the King, it would not have suited Conroy's book that he should marry at all, more especially into the Coburg-Kent circle. It is therefore with some interest that we find him being created a Knight Commander of the Hanoverian Order about the same time that his future Até was raised to the rank of a Hanoverian Baroness. What was the King's motive ? It can hardly have been a desire to reward services rendered seven years before to a brother whom he had never liked, or, more recently, to a sister-in-law for whom his regard was, to say the least of it, tepid.

At this trying moment the Duchess of Kent turned to the friend who had never failed her — the Duchess of Clarence. According to Greville it was Adelaide who ' made ' the marriage which took place a year later between Feodore and Prince Ernest Christian Charles of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, a member of an ancient house which had elected " to fight in the Prussian Army against Napoleon rather than to receive gifts from him ", and thereby lost its ruling status. And so the charming figure of Feodore vanished from the Kensington circle, to reappear at intervals surrounded by children ; and Leigh Hunt's eyes were no longer delighted by any glimpse of her walking hand in hand with her sister by a cross path from the Bayswater Gate.

Seven years later, when the next reign had begun and the once-cordial relations between William and Adelaide on the one hand and the Duchess of Kent on the other were a thing of the past, Greville, dining with Wellington, gleaned some interesting information. George IV, according to the Duke, disliked the Duchess and was " always talking of taking her child from her ", egged on no doubt by the Duke of Cumberland, who " was also her enemy ". Wellington, with

his habitual good sense, side-tracked the King "not by opposing him when he talked of it, but by putting the thing off as well as he could".

It was a curious and in some ways a dangerous situation. Everyone knew that the King could not live many years longer, and that any steps he took to separate Princess Victoria from her mother would almost certainly be reversed as soon as the Duke of Clarence came to the throne. On the other hand, an open rupture in the Family would be deplorable, for the Duchess was popular with the masses and with the lower middle class, and in the sphere of politics her champions ranged from the astute Alderman Wood, Devonshire druggist and hop-merchant, to the flamingly chivalrous Daniel O'Connell, Irish patriot and agitator. Sentimentalists like Leigh Hunt dwelt upon the supposed ideal relationship between the little Princess and her mother, "the good mother who had helped to make her so affectionate". Hunt wrote later, with unconscious irony, that as she grew up, "the world never seemed to hear of her except as it wished to hear, that is to say, in connection with her mother"; and it is certain that to the majority of her future subjects the lesser light appeared always as revolving modestly round the greater.

Wellington, loyal servant of the throne whoever happened to be sitting on it, cast about for some means of reconciling Cumberland with the Duchess of Kent and so removing an irritant from the already inflamed mind of the King. His opportunity came in the summer of 1828 when the Cumberlands paid a visit to England, and "there was a question" how the Royal Family would receive the Duchess.

Sir Herbert Taylor urged upon Princess Augusta the advisability of receiving her, and the Duke of Wellington persuaded Prince Leopold to write to the Duchess of Kent, who was at Claremont, advising her very strongly "from

him " to write to the Duchess of Cumberland and "express her regret at being absent on her arrival and so prevented from calling on her and asking after her health, etc." The Duchess of Kent sent her brother to the Duke to enquire his reason for giving this advice, and received the characteristic reply that His Grace would not say why ; that he knew more of what was going on than she possibly could ; that he gave her this advice for her own benefit ; and again repeated that she had better act on it. There was no one at that juncture in the *entourage* of the Duchess who would encourage her to defy Wellington, and she acted upon his advice, remarking that she was willing to give him credit for the goodness of his counsel, even though he would not say what his reasons were. " This ", says Greville, " succeeded, and the D. of C. ceased to blow the coals." He did not cease, however, to dislike the Duchess of Kent, for whom his feelings would be further exacerbated by her hob-nobbing with the supporters of Catholic Emancipation, a measure which he was then opposing with characteristic fierceness.

" Matters ", according to Greville, " went on quietly enough " till the old King died. The immediate sequel to Wellington's intervention was, however, interesting. Some time after, when the Duke encountered Her Royal Highness, she broached the subject with a promptitude and decision that cannot have been without significance, thanking him for the message he had sent her, but begging him " whenever he had anything again to say to her again to communicate with herself or her servant, Sir John Conroy, and not with her Brother, who had nothing to do with her concerns, nor she with his ". Greville was shocked at what he regarded as a display of gross ingratitude ; he does not seem to have been aware that the incident coincided with the opening of Prince Leopold's fantastic *liaison* with

Stockmar's pretty actress cousin, Caroline Bauer, whom he established, with her mother, in an elegant residence in the newly-developed district of Regent's Park.

The Duchess's views may not have been austere where her brothers were concerned, but it cannot have been agreeable to see the one nearest at hand preoccupied with this daughter of the theatre whose first and chief charm for him was her accidental resemblance to the beloved Charlotte. This preoccupation it was which prevented him from doing what the Prince Consort considered he ought to have done — taking the trouble to "guide" his widowed sister, and thus counteracting the influence of Conroy. He had other interests, political and amorous; no amount of regret for Charlotte had prevented him from falling deeply in love with Lady Emmeline Manners, afterwards Lady Emmeline Stuart-Wortley, who added to the traditional good looks of the Rutland family an adventurous spirit which would have stood both her and her husband in good stead had she married the Prince and had he become King of Greece.

The Duchess of Kent had other causes for family anxiety between 1820 and 1829. Her brother Ernest, himself what the mid-Victorians would have called "a loose fish", divorced his wayward little wife in 1826 on account of Freiherr Alexander von Haustein, and Luise married her lover as soon as it was legally possible, leaving her two small sons, Ernest and Albert, more or less in the care of their grandmother, the Duchess-Dowager, at Rosenau—a desertion which the younger never forgot.

It should be remembered that, though her reputation was at this period free from any shadow, Victoria of Kent belonged to a family in which ambiguous relationships were quite usual.

Meanwhile "her servant, Sir John Conroy" was assiduously cultivating potentially useful friends in high places.

He contrived to get on to good terms with both Wellington and Melbourne, and he was also astute enough to treat with breezy affability those tradesmen and merchants with whom his duties as Comptroller brought him in contact. The only person whom he omitted to conciliate was the small, fair-haired person quietly eating bread and milk from a silver bowl while the Duchess dined.

CHAPTER VI

'HER SERVANT, SIR JOHN CONROY'

> Desire of power, on earth a vicious weed,
> Yet sprung from high is of celestial seed;
> In God 'tis glory; and when men aspire
> 'Tis but a spark too much of heavenly fire.
>
> DRYDEN, *Absalom and Achitophel*

WRITING in reply to enquiries from his eldest son Edward in 1836, Sir John Conroy declared that it was "allowed in County Roscommon that the Malconry's were an ancient sept or family". Their territory, he explained, was all that part of Roscommon leaving Jamestown and going towards Stokestown along the Shannon, called in Irish Tuyrowen, which is the County of the Lakes — "a wild county, woody, boggy and watery". In process of time the name, originally written 'Omulconaire', became 'Conroy', and though the Conroys of Clonahue claimed to be the eldest branch, Sir John informed his son with obvious satisfaction that *he* was "considered by the old people to be the chief of the family".

His letter, in a sprawling, difficult hand on stiff grey paper, is preserved, together with a mass of notes on the Malconry family, among the MSS. bequeathed to Balliol College by his grandson, another Sir John Conroy and the last, on whose death unmarried in 1905 the baronetcy became extinct.

The first Sir John's grandfather, of whom more anon, had projected a history of the sept, which, with the aid of

" ancient sources ", he traced back to Muireadhaigh, the 131st King of Ireland, *obiit* A.D. 331 ; and Sir Edward reverted to the idea, collecting materials with much industry, though never, apparently, getting as far as the first chapter of the proposed work. The last Sir John, a distinguished man of science, did not pursue his father's historical researches, though he preserved his notes, which for many years have slumbered undisturbed in an old tin deed-box at Balliol.

Ancient indeed was the sept of the Malconrys, Omulconaires, or O'Mulconrys. Compared with King Muireadhaigh, the " celebrated historian, Fanaidhe Omulconaire ", who died in 1136, is an almost modern figure, and the " famous scribe, Caiolre O'Mulconaire ", who flourished in 1511, a mere man of yesterday. We are on more solid ground with Maylin O'Mulconry, who married Catherine, daughter of Teague O'Flanagan, and died in 1637. The last Catholic of this line, Charles Conry, shed the ' Mul ', received a grant of lands in County Roscommon from Charles II, and died fighting on the losing side at the Battle of the Boyne.

Then, suddenly, there steps into view towards the 1740's, the gay, vivid person of " Johnny Conroy of Elphin ", the grandfather of the first Sir John. " Through favour of the then Lord Lieutenant ", says Sir Edward's account of him in the Conroy MSS., " he obtained a very lucrative situation in County Cork — the collectorship of that city." Though " noted for his wit, accomplishments and grace of person ", he was still unmarried at the age of forty, when an incident which occurred at a ball in Cork won for him the hand of Elizabeth Fulke, " the reigning belle and toast of Cork, subsequently rich by the death of her brother, John Fulke of Trinity College, Dublin ". This was no doubt the John Conroy of whom his descend-

ants used to relate that he spelled the name in the traditional manner, *i.e.* Conry, until one evening, at a convivial party where the guests were making rhymes to their own surnames, he was inspired to declare,

"Johnny Conroy
Is a rollicking boy".

His friends called him "Johnny Conroy" ever after, and, becoming enamoured of this new form of his name, he assumed it formally and thenceforth answered to no other.

Collector Johnny Conroy had been wooing the young lady for some time, but she would not marry him, "partly", remarks Sir Edward, "through the opposition of her father, who inherited the Puritan hatred of his family to Irishmen of Celtic blood, and partly through her own gaiety and love of admirers".

At this ball he fought a duel with a sneering rival, "*more hibernico* — that is — on the instant and in the presence of many friends, who left the ballroom to witness 'the affair'". The challenger was a very good swordsman, but Conroy, who felt himself to be a better, stood at first on the defensive, and it was not until he was slightly wounded in the wrist that he was "incited to more aggressive measures". He then lunged, exclaiming as he did so, "*This* for my wrist!" — but the thrust was parried. With a cry of "*That* for myself!" he lunged once more, only to fail a second time. "The third", records Sir Edward, "was fatal, for Mr. Conroy's sword passed clean through the body of his opponent, the hilt striking against his breastbone with a loud thump. As he made the conclusive lunge my great-grandfather cried with animation, "Take *that* for Miss Fulke!"

Miss Fulke accepted Johnny Conroy the following morning; and it is agreeable to know that the 'fatal'

thrust did not kill his rival, but merely disabled him for several months. The young lady's father allowed her and her husband £1000 a year on their marriage, but made a Will leaving all his considerable fortune to Lord Lisle if no son had been born to them before his death. Unluckily the first issue were daughters, and John Ponsonby Conroy, not being born in the lifetime of his grandfather, lost the bulk of the Fulke property, though it may be presumed that he inherited his uncle John Fulke's share.

Concerning John Ponsonby Conroy and his descendants we have a most valuable source of information of which something must now be said. In 1883 Sir Francis Galton drew up a questionnaire, *The Record of Family Faculties*, in which he invited interested persons to fill in all known particulars as to the height, mental faculties, physical appearance, medical history, "character and temper" of their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, and sisters, with various ramifications, in order to provide him with material for his researches. A prize of £500 was offered for the most complete and informative set of answers, and among those who were interested in the scheme was Sir John Conroy, F.R.S., at that time Science Tutor at Keble, and from 1890 until his death Science Tutor and Fellow of Balliol. He took a first class in Natural Science at his own College, Christ Church, and was the author of papers on Polarization, Metallic Reflection, and the Dioxides of Calcium and Strontium, besides being the inventor of some part of the apparatus used in lighthouses, and, on the testimony of those now living who remember him, a singularly charming as well as very brilliant man.

He filled in Galton's questionnaire with proper scientific detachment, but there is nothing to show whether any use was ever made of the information thus supplied. The interest of this reconstruction of the Conroy family is

certainly much more than academic, and it gains value from the fact that it was made by one distinguished scientist for another.

The earliest figure delineated in any detail is that of John Ponsonby Conroy, the son of Collector Johnny and Elizabeth Fulke, who was born in Cork in 1759. His grandson notes that he was "a fair classical scholar (several of his T.C.D. prize books exist) and a well-known Irish wit", popular with Lords Lieutenant "for his social qualities", like his father before him. In addition, he was a notable amateur actor, and the only known portrait of him shows him in the character of Falstaff. At this point it is possible to fill in the outline with the aid of an old letter preserved by Sir Edward and stowed away among some unpromising-looking genealogical tables. This letter was written from Dublin in 1785 to his future mother-in-law, Mrs. Francis Vernon Wilson, *née* Charlotte Clerke, "the daughter of a Norfolk yeoman family". The young law student had been visiting the Wilson family at Conway, North Wales, and he writes to his hostess that "the hurry he has experienced since his arrival in Dublin" would at any time incommode him, but when contrasted with "the dear, dear tranquillity" that he left has been "almost insupportable". The postscript, directed to "Miss M. Wilson", is too delightful not to be quoted in full:

I esteem a Chess Pupil so dear a connection that it would beget a chilliness at my very heart to request merely to be remembered to her when I had an opportunity of immediately addressing her, and yet, Madam, I ought to owe you no good will — you put to rout my legal ideas at Conway and so impregnated me with Romance as will render it difficult for me to become hackney'd in the ways of Men. I do nothing but compare the hardness of the flags to the softness of the sods in Arcadia, the disgusting wisdom of some to your attractive ignorance — in short (with your mother's permission in her

letter) give me one reason, if you can, why as I now am, I should not esteem you more my foe than my friend.

Young Mr. Conroy's legal ideas were not so utterly put to rout by his charming chess pupil that he failed in the examinations for the Irish Bar. He was duly called, and in the same year, 1785, married Miss Wilson, of whom it is recorded that she had brown eyes and light-brown hair, and was "a descendant of Cromwellian settlers in Tully, Co. Longford". Seven years younger than her husband, she outlived him by forty-eight years. During the brief span of their married life — 1785–97 — she bore him five sons and one daughter, of whom only the eldest son was still living at the time of her own death in 1845.

Although the Conroys had tended mainly to politics, the law, and country life, a new element came into the family with Miss Wilson, perhaps inherited from her Cromwellian ancestors. Three of the sons went into the Army, and two enjoyed the valuable friendship of the Marquis of Hastings, Lord Granard, and the Prince Regent's Irish private secretary, Sir James Macmahon. The eldest was born on October 21, 1786, at Mazey Castle, Caerhyn, Carnarvonshire, and gazetted second lieutenant, Royal Artillery, September 8, 1803. His grandson thus tabulates his "faculties": *Adult height*, 6 feet; *hair*, black; *eyes*, grey; "a very fine-looking man with a largish nose"; *senses*, normal; *mental powers and energy*, "*suae fortunae faber*"; *character and temper*, "violent temper, under complete control".

Suae fortunae faber suggests that in spite of occasional lucky marriages the Conroy family ran true to type, and remained, *more hibernico*, rather impecunious. As to the physical characteristics, the height, the black hair, the grey eyes, the "largish nose" were all inherited by his son and grandson, neither of whom seems to have resembled the first Sir John in any other way.

'Her Servant, Sir John Conroy'

Stationed in Dublin with his regiment in 1806, John Conroy met and fell in love with the seventeen-year-old only daughter of General Benjamin Fisher. She was very tall — 5 feet 10 inches — with black or very dark-brown hair, and grey eyes. Though her senses are described by her grandson as " normal ", he noted against *mental powers and energy*, " below the average, a perfect cypher ". As to her *mode of life*, it was, he wrote, " very sedentary ". For a vigorous, high-spirited man like Conroy she may have been either the best possible or the worst possible wife. On December 8, 1806, they were married in Dublin, by special licence.

Of their six children, four sons and two daughters, the eldest, Edward, was born at Dublin in 1809; Elizabeth Jane followed in 1811; Arthur in 1813, only to die four years later; Stephen Rowley in 1815; Henry George in 1817; and finally, Marie Louise Victoire in 1819. Mrs. Conroy's health, never robust, began to fail early, and she suffered from almost incessant neuralgia. She was for a time Woman of the Bedchamber to the Duchess of Kent, and we occasionally see her, a vague, languishing figure, now in a top-hat and a trailing habit, riding with the royal party in the Park, now in scarf and plumes accompanying Lehzen, Victoria, and Victoire to the opera. What were her relations with the Duchess it is not difficult to imagine. Ill-health would keep her often in her own bedchamber, and her colourless, acquiescent disposition would make it easy to forget her presence when she emerged.

By the time that the Conroy star began to rise over the Palace the elder children were out of the nursery, and only made fleeting appearances there; but the youngest, Victoire, was the constant playmate and companion of Princess Victoria. Her nephew has little to say about her; perhaps he did not know much. She was 5 feet 6 inches in height,

and had the family grey eyes and dark hair. If the Princess's sketch of her is to be believed, the family good looks had passed her by ; but she was affectionate and intelligent, and devoted to her godmother, the Duchess.

For a woman who loved the theatre, and of whom one of her daughters wrote to the other that " her mind was young to the last ", the Duchess of Kent had singularly narrow views on the subject of reading. She held that time spent in reading novels was time wasted. It is true that many of the novels then in circulation were of the Minerva Press type, maudlin and saccharine, and sometimes even pernicious. But the works of Miss Austen and Sir Walter Scott and Miss Edgeworth were much in vogue. Victoire Conroy was a lover of romantic fiction. She read, among other novels, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and she had the imprudence to recommend the Princess to read it. Disgrace and punishment followed, though whether before or after the advice had been taken is not clear. Victoria's opportunities for uncensored reading can have been few, and this anecdote is given for what it is worth on the authority of a writer who claimed to have had it straight from the younger Conroys themselves. Even if not accurate *au pied de la lettre*, it is interesting as indicative of Victoire's influence over Victoria and of the views prevailing at Kensington Palace on the subject of novel-reading. Perhaps if Victoire's mother had not been a " sedentary cypher " she herself would have had no opportunity of making the acquaintance of Miss Caroline Wilhelmina Amelia Skeggs.

The two children were near in age but unlike in appearance, Victoire being the taller, darker and slighter, as well as the more active mentally. People who saw the two walking and playing together in the Palace gardens imagined that the discrepancy in age was greater than it actually was, and marked the affectionate manner in which the fair child

with the blue sash clung to the hand of the dark child with the red one. They shared walks, dancing lessons, riding lessons, visits to the theatre and to the seaside; but they did not share their dolls, for the Princess always kept a firm grasp on her flounced and feathered family, and Victoire's father declared mockingly that she took after her grandmother, Queen Charlotte.

When this possessive Princess became Queen, and the Conroy star sank to its setting, she did not except Victoire from the general ban, and turned her back on her one-time playmate with astonishing and unamiable finality. The Duchess, however, continued to correspond with her goddaughter, both before and after her marriage to Major Edward Wyndham Hanmer of the Royal Horse Guards, and only death ended her interest. When the Duchess died, Lady Augusta Stanley wrote to "poor Mrs. Hanmer, to give her details", and had, moreover, the courage to hand to Queen Victoria the "very painful note" in which that lady hinted at her regret that she "might not express what she felt to H.M." They were both middle-aged matrons now, but as the Queen sat "poring over the letter" the barrier of the years was broken through, and they were children again. Victoria raised her head and said to Lady Augusta, "I never could forget the affection I had for her as a girl; this is the first indication I have received of her still being interested in *me*". Apparently the Duchess had not reopened the closed Conroy pages even to let her daughter know that her old playmate held her in kindly remembrance.

A little may be added, on the authority of the Galton *Record*, concerning the brothers and sisters of Victoire. Sir Edward, according to his son, "lived in a very fast set in early life, sedentary in middle age, and spent his last ten years in a *very* hot room". Six feet in height, with grey

eyes and the Conroy nose, " he kept his silky hair almost untouched by grey till death ". His son records his fondness for hunting, genealogy, and antiquarian matters in general, but does not mention that he was attaché to a special mission to Brussels, 1831–38, and Deputy Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths in London, 1836–42. Sir Edward made a rather romantic runaway match with Lady Alicia Parsons, sister of Lord Rosse of telescope fame.

Victoire's only sister, Elizabeth Jane, died unmarried aged forty-four. Always ailing, she led a very sedentary life, " breakfast in bed, etc.", but found sufficient energy to be " musical ".

The second of the Conroy brothers, Stephen Rowley, was born at Government House, Gosport, entered the Coldstream Guards, and was for a time aide-de-camp to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland ; " lived ", wrote his nephew, " in a very fast set in London ", and died of consumption at Wiesbaden at the early age of twenty-six. He inherited the light-brown hair of the Conroy grandmother who outlived him by several years. This is the brother whose testimony is so fully quoted in *Victoria, Queen and Ruler* [1] concerning the childhood of the Queen, and in whom it is suggested that she felt a warmer — if only childish — interest than was regarded with approval in high places. There is at least one error in the account of him there given. He is said to have died " within view of Buckingham Palace, but unnoticed by the Queen, who at the time of his death was preparing for her first tour in Scotland ". Actually the place of his death was a German spa, and the year, 1841.

The other brother, Henry George, was a Colonel in the Grenadier Guards, and, like Stephen, a gay fellow, fond of racing. Of all the family only he and Edward survived

[1] By Emily Crawford, Paris Correspondent of the *Daily News* and *Truth*, 1903.

" the truest of mothers ", as Lady Conroy is called on the memorial tablet at Arborfield.

Such were the Conroys, old and young.

When Sir John Conroy began his reign at Kensington the other gentlemen of the household were getting old, and he was the only man of strong personality in the circle. The Duchess's position was delicate and difficult, and he somehow persuaded her that it was dangerous as well. With Leopold lacking in interest and Cumberland suspected of plotting either to kidnap the young Princess or to poison her, it is hardly surprising that the poor lady should have leaned more and more heavily on the supporting arm which her Comptroller so gallantly offered her.

George IV, who liked amusing Irishmen, would not be personally prejudiced against this specimen of the " rollicking boy " breed, especially as Conroy was on friendly terms with Macmahon. But, if Greville is to be believed, the friction between Lehzen and Sir John began before the King's death, and His Majesty sided with Lehzen. " Poor old Späth ", as Feodore called her, seems to have been sufficiently imprudent to remonstrate with the Duchess of Kent upon the unconventional demeanour of her Comptroller, and it is highly probable that her anxious, censorious face irritated Conroy to such a point that he insisted that she should be dismissed. Lehzen, whose sentiments were identical with Spaeth's but who was too clever to betray them, bitterly resented the dismissal of her colleague, and it is clear that, like the Pope's mule, she kept her kick for ten years. In the meantime she continued to sap and mine under the very nose of the affably unconscious Duchess. An ironical situation arose when the household received the sacrament together in the florid little chapel at Kensington Palace. Two of them, Conroy and Lehzen, can hardly have been in love and charity with one another even at a moment

so solemn, and to those two was added the enigmatic figure of Princess Victoria after her confirmation in 1835. Few things in history are more curious than the manner in which Lehzen sharpened that seemingly blunt weapon, the mind of the future Queen of England.

Boisterous and sanguine, Conroy went his way, encouraging the Duchess to depend upon his judgment, inciting her to demand increasing recognition of her importance, and working upon her rather plastic mind with deplorable results. The growing emphasis laid by him on her status as mother of the Heiress Presumptive to the throne was in the worst possible taste, for poor Adelaide's pregnancies and miscarriages, and the rumours to which they gave rise, did not cease until after her good-natured husband became William IV.

Good-natured indeed was that rather odd figure of a King, and if he and his Queen had had their way, relations between Kensington and Buckingham Palace would have been as close as between Kensington and Clarence House. Only on the hypothesis of Conroy's influence can the change in the Duchess of Kent's attitude be explained. A fortnight before the death of George IV Lord Ellenborough had noted in his *Diary*, " It seems the Duchess of Clarence and the Duchess of Kent were and are great friends, and the Duchess of Clarence is very fond of the young Princess ". The Duke, too, had been fond of her, and Adelaide had been much affected when on one occasion the infant Victoria, catching sight of her uncle's star and remembering her father's portrait, had hailed him with a welcoming cry of " Papa, Papa ! "

It cannot be doubted that both he and the Queen would have asked nothing better than to have the little Princess constantly with them. This would not have suited Conroy's book. The child would be petted and spoiled, and made

to think of herself as someone of importance; her mother's authority would be undermined. Little did he dream how it was at that very moment being undermined by methods far more insidious than any that the kind, simple aunt and uncle would have been likely to employ.

Trouble began almost as soon as the unwieldy coffin of George IV had been consigned to the vault at Windsor. The Duchess of Kent, no doubt instigated by Conroy, then wrote to the Duke of Wellington desiring that she should be treated as Dowager Princess of Wales, with a suitable income for herself and her daughter, over which she demanded to have full control. To this the Duke replied with soldierly directness that "her proposition was altogether inadmissible"; but that she might rely upon it that no measure which affected her in any way should be considered without the fullest information being given her. Upon which she was foolish enough to take offence, and to refuse to speak to His Grace for a long time after.

The Princess was now ten years old, and the moment seemed ripe for a little judicious propaganda. The Duchess, upon the plea that she wished to be satisfied that the system of education then being pursued was based on the right lines, called into council the Bishops of London and Lincoln "to test the result by personal examination". However far her English studies may by then have advanced, it seems impossible that she could have framed unaided the long, carefully-planned letter to their lordships which the general public was permitted to share with them. The obvious person to draft it would be Conroy, and, reading between the lines, it is possible to trace the picture of the Duchess which he desired the nation to accept as a true likeness. "By the death of her revered father when she was eight months old," wrote the Duchess concerning her daughter, "her sole care and charge devolved to me"—a skilful

reminder that little or no help or counsel had been forthcoming from the Family. "Stranger as I then was," she goes on, "I became deeply impressed with the absolute necessity of bringing her up entirely in this country." No credit is given to Leopold for deterring her from following her first impulse to return to Germany; she is no longer willing to share the limelight with her bereaved brother. "Every feeling" was to be that of the Princess's native land, and the Duchess proved her devotion to duty by "rejecting all those feelings of home and kindred" that divided her heart.

There could hardly have been a more clever move than the publication of this appealing epistle on the eve of the framing of the Regency Bill; but there was a certain insensitiveness in the allusion to the education that was to fit the child "to be either the sovereign of these realms or fill a junior station in the Royal Family until the Will of Providence should show at a later stage what her destiny was to be".

The Bishops are then informed that the Duchess "almost always attends every lesson, or a part", and that she had "resolved to act in that matter" so as to be the Princess's governess herself. Here again it is possible to correct the perspective with the aid of Queen Victoria's marginal notes on Agnes Strickland's book. Where Miss Strickland had written that Victoria read history with Lehzen "in the presence of the Duchess" the royal pencil inserted an emphatic "*not*" before the last clause. It seems, therefore, that "almost always" must be interpreted as meaning "sometimes" — or even never.

Nobody knew better than Conroy that neither the Bishops nor the general public would be predisposed in favour of a lady who exhibited the unfeminine quality of arrogance. It was correct and becoming that the weaker

vessel should defer to the stronger. "I do not presume", writes the Duchess modestly, "to have an over-confidence in what I have done; on the contrary, as a female, as a stranger (but only in birth, as I feel that this is my country by the duties I fulfil and the support I receive) I naturally desire to have a candid opinion from authorities competent to give one."

It is certainly not on account of purity of diction or lucidity of thought that this letter looks unlike the original composition of "a female and a stranger". But its wordy diffuseness is most characteristic of the style cultivated by military men grappling with official correspondence at that period. It is, indeed, very much in the manner of the "revered father" himself, whose spirit Mr. Robert Owen no doubt imagined hovering over the little Princess and her Mamma as they walked in the green pleasaunces of Kensington. If Conroy did indeed draw up this letter, he must be credited with a timely piece of propaganda, for in November 1830 Parliament appointed the Duchess Regent of the realm in the event of her daughter succeeding to the throne while yet a minor. This was a glorious rebuff for that clique which deprecated the idea of a female succeeding to the throne, with the resultant severance of the union with Hanover, and which would have liked to see the Salic law tardily introduced into England. This clique dated back to the time when poor young Charlotte was Heiress Presumptive and had then used all its influence to get her married to a foreign Prince who would insist upon her making her home abroad and thus weakening the link between her and her own people. As under the Salic law the Duke of Cumberland would have stood next in the line of succession after William IV, he could hardly fail to regard it as a law which the English had been singularly ill-advised not to adopt at an early period in their history. He found an unexpected

ally in Lord Eldon, familiarly known as "Bags"; and it was suspected, without any reason, that the admirable Sir Herbert Taylor was another of his aiders and abettors. This group was naturally eyed with distrust by Grey and the rest of the Reform Party peers, those patrician Radicals whom the new King instinctively hated, and who ranged themselves on the side of the Duchess of Kent and her child. Not for nothing had the dead Duke cultivated the Left!

The subject of a possible Regency was mentioned in the King's Speech at the opening of Parliament on November 2, 1830, and a Bill was introduced a fortnight later, framed by Wellington's Cabinet to meet the views of Grey and his followers. There was at least one good Tory who would have nothing to do with the Salic clique, and that was Wellington himself; but his administration fell before the Bill could be passed, and it devolved upon Grey, as his successor, to see it through. "This", exclaimed the Duchess of Kent, "is the first really happy day I have spent since I lost the Duke of Kent!" It was indeed a happy day; and upon no one can its beams have fallen more genially than upon her Comptroller, whose faith in his own luck must have been sensibly fortified.

The odd, kind old King did not relish all these reminders that he was no longer a young man. Still flushed with excitement at his royal rôle, it was painful for him to realize that he could not expect to play it for many years to come; and the tacit admission that his marriage would never supply a healthy heir to the throne would hurt him as much on Adelaide's account as his own. Grey had provided that if the Queen's hopes of maternity should be renewed after the King's demise, Princess Victoria should be Queen during the interim, and that in the event of the King leaving an heir, Adelaide was to be Regent. These provisions were

reasonable and, indeed, necessary; but they could hardly be agreeable to all the persons concerned.

From the passing of the Regency Bill a progressive deterioration of the relations between the Court and Kensington is visible. The King did not pause to ask if there were any good or even possible alternative to the Duchess of Kent. He saw her thrust first forward by Parliament, and then thrusting herself forward, buxom and triumphant, tasting in advance the sweets of power, and personifying successful maternity.

Parliament showed its sense of her merits by voting her an additional £10,000 a year. Wellington told Ellenborough the sum was to be £20,000, but thriftier counsels prevailed. Even so, the Duchess had reason for satisfaction which she marked by accompanying the ladies of the Family to the House of Lords. Interested eyes were raised to the royal circle, and the general opinion grew that between the intrigues of the Cumberland clique and the person of the little Heiress Presumptive there stood a woman of reassuring vitality, energy, and determination.

It is not difficult to evoke the scene. The King, short, stout, irascible, genial, hitching up his royal robes as if they were a sailor's nankin trousers, and distributing his smiles and his glares between the peers who enjoyed or did not enjoy his favour; the Queen, meagre and *maladive*, her face flushed from time to time by a chronic cough; Princess Augusta, the Senior Princess, handsome and jolly, with traces still of that comeliness which had made Mrs. Papendiek call her "the most beautiful creature one would wish to behold"; and the newly-enriched and exalted Duchess of Kent, her dark eyes flashing and her warm colour glowing under her pendent plumes. One figure missing from the scene was present in most minds; the figure of the little girl who might at no great distance of time break the dull

sequence of middle-aged monarchs on the British throne.

Faithful to his promise that no measure which affected her in any way should be considered without being imparted to her, Wellington had desired the King's leave to wait upon the Duchess of Kent when the Regency Bill was first introduced. She was at Claremont at the time, and coolly sent word that she was out of town; adding the request that he should send the draft of the Bill to her in the country. The Duke was annoyed, as well he might be, and wrote rather stiffly that he could not explain what he had to say so fully by letter as he could have done in a personal interview, but that he would do so as well as he could. During this exchange of letters Lyndhurst brought the measure forward in the Lords, and the Duchess sent Conroy up to hear the debate. All these incidents mark progressive stages in her Comptroller's campaign to keep her aloof and to make himself the chief, if not the only, channel of communication between her and the outside world. He showed very little wisdom in encouraging her to slight the Duke of Wellington, and less still in urging her on to assert her dignity and importance in a way calculated to irritate the King.

During this important year Prince Leopold was again offered the Crown of Greece, which he accepted, subject to adequate financial arrangements being made. This time it was a near thing, and if Lord Liverpool at the Foreign Office had been a little more generous, it might have come off. Leopold himself believed that Prince Metternich was working secretly against him, which seems curious, as his candidature was warmly supported by the Austrian Chancellor's mistress, Princess Lieven; but it can hardly be doubted that the eloquent warnings of Capo d'Istria, the first President of Greece, did as much as Lord Liverpool's parsimony to change the mind of the King-elect. Leopold may be pardoned for his *volte-face* when confronted with the

prospect of living in a small thatched house on coarse black bread, and forfeiting "the pleasures of society and the comforts of home". As a young soldier of fortune he might have faced these hardships with equanimity. But he was now a man of forty who for thirteen years had enjoyed a well-paid sinecure.

Mr. Creevey, however, interpreted the Prince's 'jib' in another light. "I suppose", he wrote, "Mrs. Kent thinks her daughter's reign is coming on apace, and that her brother may be useful to her as *versus* Cumberland." Whatever "Mrs. Kent" may have thought, it was not Leopold who was the guiding force during the interval before that reign began. His Highness was not a favourite at Windsor, where his water-drinking habits were taken by the King as a personal affront: but he would have been far too shrewd to hound on his sister against the Court. It is not without significance that the little niece whose mind he did so much to mould remained secretly attached to her royal uncle and aunt, and openly showed her affection for Queen Adelaide as soon as she herself became Queen.

No anxiety to be useful to his sister caused Leopold to jib at the crown of Belgium when in 1831 Palmerston decided that he would be a more suitable sovereign than the French candidate, the Duc de Nemours. After that the field was free for Conroy.

The coronation of William and Adelaide was unfortunately made the occasion of another exhibition of intransigence on the part of the Duchess of Kent. The King and Queen had been anxious that Princess Victoria should be present at the ceremony, but the Duchess refused to permit it, on the plea that "the fatigue would be too much for her". She had no doubt every right to decide this question in what she regarded as the interests of her child, and excessive solicitude is an amiable if sometimes irritating quality. Her

conduct in relation to her own attendance was less excusable.

The King instructed Lord Howe, that peculiar peer who nourished a vain passion for Queen Adelaide, to write to Her Royal Highness and ask whom she wished to carry her coronet. The Duchess vouchsafed no reply. After several fruitless efforts to obtain one, the King told Howe to write again, and remarking, "*I* will get you an answer", he scrawled *Wm R.* at the foot of the letter. Still she made no personal reply. Sir John Conroy wrote on her behalf that "if she attended at all", Lord Morpeth[1] should carry her coronet. People who were in a position to mark this progressive decline in courtesy were rightly shocked. Mr. Greville was even indignant. The Duchess, he wrote, "chuses to set herself in opposition to the King on all occasions, and behave to him with all possible impertinence. The K. and Q. are however both determined not to quarrel with her, and take no notice of her misbehaviour, in my opinion very foolishly, for if the King chose to put forth his power, she would be crushed, such is his supreme authority over his own family. I", added Greville fiercely, "should like to have to deal with her impertinence for a little while."

Wellington was another person who condemned and deplored the whole affair. When Greville asked him why the Duchess set herself in such opposition to the Court, His Grace answered laconically that Sir John Conroy was her adviser. Greville then characteristically said that he concluded Conroy was her lover; and the Duke, also characteristically, rejoined that he "supposed so".

The Duchess and Conroy must share the blame for the story which went round, and which has developed into a legend handed down in whispers to the present day. Cynics like Greville, disillusioned men of the world like Wellington,

[1] Afterwards 7th Earl of Carlisle, Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1835–41, Lord Lieutenant, 1855–59.

naturally supposed that a man who enjoyed so much power and flaunted it so arrogantly must enjoy other privileges as well. Conroy was a handsome fellow at the height of his physical and mental energy; he had a valetudinarian wife, who spent the greater part of her time in ailing seclusion. He was ambitious, domineering, and thick-skinned. And the Duchess was a comely, full-blooded, attractive matron of forty-four — the same age as himself. What wonder that the most scandalous interpretation was put on their friendship? The analogy of Marie Louise and Count Neippurg would hardly be missed.

Proof and disproof are equally impossible at this distance of time, and lacking documentary evidence. A careful study of the Duchess's character in middle and later life does not suggest either that she was a woman who would sin light-heartedly or that she was one burdened with remorse. It is not without interest that while Hummelauer, the Austrian Ambassador, was firmly convinced of her guilt, Bourqueney, the French *chargé d'affaires*, always a stout supporter of hers, "insisted that she had no politics, and that the attacks upon her were a Tory manœuvre, countenanced if not inspired by Windsor".[1] Certainly no chivalrous scruples deterred the Duke of Cumberland from working against his sister-in-law in what he honestly considered to be the best interests of England. He must have viewed with dismay the prospect of a Regency which would encourage and exalt the very elements, Radical, Reforming, and Roman Catholic, which were to him synonymous with the ruin of the country.

There are one or two points, small enough in themselves, which seem to support the more charitable view. For example, in the list of pictures at Arborfield drawn up by Sir Edward Conroy two engravings are noted as having

[1] Professor C. K. Webster in *History*, June 1937.

been presented to Sir John by the Duchess in 1847 — ten years after his banishment from Court. One is a portrait of herself, the other, an engraving of the Duke of Kent at the capture of Santa Lucia. Surely only a very humourless or insensitive woman would give a portrait of her husband to a man who had been her lover! Another picture in Sir Edward's list is a portrait of George III presented to Conroy by Princess Sophia, and one of herself in a riding habit as a young girl. According to Greville this Princess incurred the enmity of Queen Victoria by allowing Conroy and the Duchess to meet unobtrusively at her little house west of Palace Green, Kensington, and a later commentator has suggested that Conroy blackmailed her. Poor Princess Sophia might have given her own portrait to a blackmailer, but surely not that of her revered and idolized father.

Greville and his kind had, of course, no doubts, and as Conroy was personally obnoxious to them, they expressed their views with vigour. "A ridiculous fellow," wrote Greville, "a compound of 'Great Hussy' and the Chamberlain of the Princess of Navarre." Hussy was "a large Irishman" who married in 1741 Isabella, Dowager Duchess of Manchester, thereby drawing from Sir Charles Hanbury Williams the *Ode* which must have recurred to the diarist's memory as he wrote. The stanzas which Mr. Greville thought pertinent were:

> But careful Heav'n design'd her Grace
> For one of the Milesian race,
> On stronger parts depending;
> Nature indeed denies them sense,
> But gives them legs and impudence
> That beats all understanding.
>
> Which to accomplish H–ss–y came,
> Opening before the noble dame
> His honourable trenches;

'Her Servant, Sir John Conroy'

Nor of rebukes or frowns afraid
He push'd his way (he knew his trade)
And won the place by inches.

Look down, St Patrick, with success
Like H–ss–y's all the Irish bless,
May they all do as he does ;
And still preserve their breed the same,
Cast in his mould, made in his frame,
To comfort English widows !

CHAPTER VII

'ON TOUR IN THE PROVINCES'

> But no — she still must hold a petty reign,
> Flank'd by her formidable chamberlain.
>
> BYRON, *The Age of Bronze*

THE Duchess of Kent and her Comptroller had not waited for the death of George IV before embarking upon the course which Conroy advocated. That shrewd observer, Princess Lieven, writing to Earl Grey in December 1829, noted that she had been present at " a long and most royal dinner " at the Duchess's. As Grey was one of the advanced Whig peers who favoured and supported Her Royal Highness, his fair correspondent would curb her pen at that point; but the phrase " most royal " is significant, and suggests an infusion of ceremony into the Kensington atmosphere which had been absent when Sir Walter Scott had dined there eighteen months before, and found his hostess " most pleasing and affable in her manner ". One year later, within four months of the late King's death, the Princess considered that both the Duchess and her brother were " holding themselves very high, as if the throne were to be theirs to-morrow ". Leopold, she added, " does not show himself, but works silently underground ".

Prominent among their friends was John George Lambton, first Baron Durham, ex-Dragoon and extreme Radical, who had sponsored in 1821 a scheme of Reform far more sweeping than that passed into law — with considerable

assistance from himself — in 1832. As son-in-law of Lord Grey — badly though the two men got on together — he had an undeniable family claim on the Duchess's regard, and as Leopold's chief bottle-holder during and after the abortive Greek negotiations he could not but stand well with the Prince's sister. Able, arrogant, ambitious, and morose, he associated himself, either personally or *in absentia*, with all the plans taking shape in the Duchess of Kent's circle; and he seems to have believed himself to be entitled to the reversion of the premiership when, in due course, a new reign should begin.

Associated with him in the Kensington Shadow Cabinet was for a short time George James Welbore Agar-Ellis, a bookish Whig of the philosophic type who was created Baron Dover on resigning in 1831 the post of Commissioner of Woods and Forests bestowed upon him only a year before. By his death in 1833 Dover escaped the disappointments awaiting his coadjutors and was spared the pain of seeing Macaulay's 'jacket-dusting' review of his edition of Walpole's Letters to Mann. He was succeeded as Commissioner by yet another member of the clique, Viscount Duncannon, afterwards fourth Earl of Bessborough. As a son of the susceptible and charming Harriet, Countess of Bessborough, he was connected by blood with the Spencers and by marriage with the Cavendishes. As brother of Lady Caroline Lamb, his relations with the Melbourne family were less difficult than might have been expected. In himself he furnished a point of contact with three great Whig clans, and his adherence would be useful for that reason if for no other, but he was also able to influence Irish votes and stood well with Daniel O'Connell. It was not until after Lord Dover's death that the younger man became prominent in the ranks of those who looked to Conroy for present guidance and future recompense. Lord Howe told

Greville in 1831 that Durham and Dover were the Duchess's chief advisers, and that "Conroy alone, however well inclined to be impertinent, would not dare". But later events suggested that for her ill-conceived conduct towards the King and Queen the blame should be divided between the three, the largest share falling upon Conroy.

To the outer edge of this circle gravitated a good many smaller personages, moved either by self-interest or an innate aptitude for political intrigue; and at its centre was the dark-eyed, gaily-gowned figure of the Duchess, her natural affability tempered by Conroy's counsels and — perhaps — by a change in her own disposition. More and more she was influenced by the advisers who urged her to assert her dignity as the mother of the Heiress Presumptive and herself a possible Regent of the realm. Nothing ought to be neglected that might enhance her importance in the eyes of the populace. Royal salutes must roar by land and sea; flags must be hoisted and ships dressed; and no opportunity must be lost by making a favourable impression in town or country. Of course it was all — or nearly all — for the sake of the little girl learning her lessons with Lehzen at Kensington. Eliminate that small image, and the larger one would suffer sudden and absolute deflation. About this time — 1831–33 — it seemed good to Conroy that Princess Victoria should be drawn forth from her seclusion and paraded before a wider audience than that which gathered to watch her walking, or watering her flowers, or playing with her dog, in the gardens of the Palace.

She was a docile, and we now know her to have been an inscrutable child. It never occurred to Conroy to try to conciliate or charm her. He never noticed that his bantering remarks left her unamused. Or, if so, he did not care. With incredible folly he treated her in a way at once jocular and cavalier. Outwardly a graceful decorum was well

maintained, and the Duchess won the warm praises of Lady Wharncliffe in 1831 — "her own manner excellent, and the way in which she brings the child *gradually* forward quite perfect". Everyone stood up, noted her ladyship, when the Princess, after kissing Aunt Sophia and curtseying "first to one side and then to the other, to all the Ladies", walked with Lehzen to bed. It would be impossible for anyone not in the very inmost circle of the Kent apartments at Kensington to guess with how little deference the Princess was sometimes treated by Mamma's Comptroller. It may have been part of Conroy's plan to keep her in subjection. If the applause of the mob or the rhetoric of City Recorders should puff her up, the result might be deplorable. So he permitted himself and — stranger still — was permitted to indulge in raillery at her expense, now telling her that in person she resembled her uncouth uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, now that in her parsimonious habits she took after her grandmother, Queen Charlotte.

These things Queen Victoria confided to Lord Melbourne in the early days of her reign; and it is curious that she always used a plural pronoun, never a singular proper noun — 'they' used to say — 'they' used to make her cross. Unlikely as it seems that the Duchess would take part in this baiting of her own daughter, one can hardly resist the conclusion that she acquiesced in it, and was therefore ranked in that retentive, remorseless memory as sharing the guilt of her Comptroller; for it is almost certain that Conroy was the arch-offender, perhaps abetted by the Duchess's Lady-in-Waiting, Lady Flora Hastings of the sharp tongue.

On one occasion 'Lord M.' remarked that he thought almost everyone's character was formed by their mother, and "if the children did not turn out well the mothers should be punished for it". He may have been thinking of his own

mother, wayward, adoring, and unwise, but as he spoke he can hardly have been unmindful of the Queen's mother, then suffering an eclipse the more painful because wholly unforeseen.

The manner in which the flag-hoisting and gun-firing increased as years passed is curious. In 1830 the Duchess and her daughter had stayed at Ramsgate in a house on the East Cliff till lately occupied by the Duke of Sussex's morganatic wife, the Duchess of Inverness. The cliff "projected considerably", and was topped by a flagstaff upon which the royal standard indicated the presence of the distinguished visitors. Though strictly speaking it was the Duchess's own personal flag, and not the royal standard, which should have been flown, no exception seems to have been taken at Windsor to this usurping of the King's unique prerogative. With every succeeding change of residence the accompanying ceremonies became more queenly, more bunting streamed, more guns thundered, more people were made aware that Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent was in their midst. It is impossible that she cannot sometimes have thought of the time which might come if her child should succeed as a minor and effect were given to the Regency Act of 1830. Then, indeed, the utmost pomp of power would be unfolded. Then, indeed, the one-time *Regentin* of a lilliputian German state would come into her own as the all-but-sovereign of the country which the Napoleonic wars had left paramount in Europe. Or, if that were not to be, if another King were an unconscionable time a-dying, and dear Victoria were to become Queen when technically of age but while still too childlike to bear the burden of absolute sovereignty, might not Parliament be persuaded, through the good Grey, or the good Durham, or some other good Whig statesman, to extend the term of the Regency as fixed by the earlier Bill? At the worst the dear child would

gladly leave everything to Mamma. She was not a self-reliant child. Was she not a timid one?

But Greville was to write of her only seven years later, "it is difficult to attribute to timidity that command over herself and that passive obedience which she showed in her whole conduct up to the moment she heard she was Queen".

Disillusionment was still distant when in the spring of 1832 the Duchess took up riding with enthusiasm. Conroy's influence may have been at work, for, like all Irishmen, he had an eye — and a heart — for a good horse. In a pencil sketch among the Conroy papers we see him, long of leg and large of nose, out riding with his younger daughter; and its pendant is a drawing by Princess Victoria, showing herself and Victoire having a riding lesson at Claremont. This last is dated "April, 1832", and during the same month there were frequent newspaper references to royal rides in the Park, over Notting Hill to the Uxbridge Road, or at Captain Fozzard's riding-school.

One of Captain Fozzard's famous pupils was Fanny Kemble, herself described by Lord Lyttelton in 1830 as "a young blood filly". All the best lady riders in London went to him, and she declared that one could tell them at a glance by "the perfect squareness of the shoulders to the horse's head, which was the invariable result of his teaching". "Old Fozzard" was an exacting master, and he taught them to ride kicking horses or take them over the bar without the aid of reins or stirrups. All these performances Miss Kemble went through one day at his request, for the edification of a middle-aged lady and a little girl, who entered suddenly through a small door in the gallery and remained standing all the while. The lady was well pleased with what she had seen, and the little girl was at once placed under Fozzard's tuition. There is nothing to indicate

whether the Captain had two royal pupils or only one, but he may have given the Duchess a refresher course, for she does not seem to have ridden at all during the Duke's lifetime.

It is not difficult to imagine the morning cavalcade emerging through the delicate wrought-iron gates of the Palace and turning eastward to Rotten Row. The two little girls, Victoria and Victoire, were always of the party and Conroy himself was almost invariably in attendance. Sometimes the tall figure of Lady Conroy, further elongated by the trailing habit, would accompany them, and presently Lehzen would bob along beside her. It must surely have been a heroic spirit that hoisted this pastor's daughter into the saddle. Riding was not likely to be numbered among the accomplishments of her class, and we find no hint that Spaeth ever showed as much enterprise.

The year of the Reform Bill, the year of the London cholera epidemic, opened cheerfully for the Duchess. She gave dinner-parties; she attended drawing-rooms. The breach between herself and the King and Queen had not yet become obvious, and she was shrewd enough to cultivate outwardly amicable relations with Cumberland.

Politically it was an agitating time. The second Reform Bill having passed the Commons, was shortly to go into Committee in the Lords. "The country", wrote Wellington on May 2, "will have to pass through a severe crisis." That same evening the Duchess of Kent entertained Their Majesties to dinner at Kensington Palace, and chose the rest of the company with what must either have been anxiety to keep the balance true or indifference upon that score. The King was known to be apoplectic about the Bill; the Queen was suspected of inflaming his resentment against its sponsors; and it had no fiercer or more convinced opponent than the Duke of Cumberland. The Duke of

Gloucester's avowed Radicalism was crumbling. Lord Dover was among the firmest supporters of the obnoxious measure. Yet here they all were, seated round the Duchess's dinner-table, with a few 'extras' in the persons of Princess Augusta, Lord Liverpool, the Conroys, and Lady Cust.

Cumberland was a man in whose mind there were no half-tones. Of his one remaining eye he was wont to remark that it was a "piercer"; and he believed that it had pierced not only the iniquities of the Reform Bill and their attendant dangers to the State but also the real character of his widowed sister-in-law and her Comptroller. At her table, and in the presence of the King and Queen, he would have to curb his tongue, but on another occasion he was once heard at a royal board to attack Conroy with startling candour upon the subject of his relations with the Duchess. (This episode has been recorded in no published memoirs, but the writer had it from a friend of one who was present.)

Some of the suspicions entertained of Cumberland and the Salic clique, especially with regard to the young Princess, were so fantastic as to need no repudiation either by the Duke himself or by his friends; yet they found credence in many quarters and they were used by Conroy and his like to enhance the Duchess's sense of discomfort and dependence. Outwardly Cumberland looked the ogre that she believed him to be; and his gaunt, disfigured features, half obliterated by moustache and whisker, made a curious contrast with the round smiling face of the King.

On the morrow of this strange dinner-party the Duchess of Kent attended the Drawing Room at St. James's in some state, with an escort of Royal Horse Guards. Two carriages were needed for herself and her suite, and Conroy was in attendance. As the known friend of the Reform Bill peers she had no reason to fear any experience such as befell Queen Adelaide, when rioters howling "Reform for Ever!"

thrust their greasy hats and their grimy faces through her carriage window.

Public excitement over the measure ran high during May, and Wellington's admirers feared that some of his Radical enemies would commit violence upon his person. But candlemakers and painters of transparencies were working overtime to meet the demand which would follow the passing of the Bill, and the usual train of theatres, operas, and exhibitions went on. The Duchess was much in evidence that season. On May 12 she witnessed a performance of *Macbeth* at Covent Garden, when Fanny Kemble made her third appearance as Lady Macbeth, playing opposite a Thane fifty-nine years older than herself, Charles Mayne Young, then within a few days of his retirement from a profession in which he had gained a fortune of £60,000. The pendulum promptly swung towards edification, if not precisely towards instruction, and the inevitable visit was paid to the Royal Academy, then holding its annual exhibition in rooms on the north front of Somerset House. British art was at that time in one of those gulfs which swallow up all national art at irregular intervals. Sir Thomas Lawrence had lain for two years in St. Paul's; his successor, Sir Martin Archer-Shee, was an Irish portrait-painter whose talent lay rather in the direction of light verse; Wilkie had exchanged his original homely style for pseudo-historical pomposity; Etty and Eastlake were in high favour; and the bland star of Maclise was about to rise. That part of the wall-space not occupied by the often-extensive canvases of the great ones was crowded with smug examples of contemporary technique and taste. Only in the field of water-colours was simple and sincere work being done, notably by the Norwich school.

It was a hot summer. The river, foul with the pollution of the whole city, carried and spread the pestilence which

had travelled from the Continent by way of Hamburg, and before long the weekly bills of mortality showed that an epidemic of cholera morbus had London in its grip.

This was the time not unwisely chosen by the Duchess's advisers for the first of those royal progresses soon to be regarded with so little enthusiasm at Windsor. On August 1 the whole party, including Lady Conroy and several of her children, set off for a tour of North Wales, a halt being made at Birmingham on the way. Here, as the surprised Princess noted in her Diary, " everything and everyone was *black* ".

It was a skilful move to enlist the good-will of " these Africans of our own growth ", who though still — and for long after — unenfranchised represented a section of the community solid for Reform. It was well, too, that the future Queen of a commercialized country should be made aware of the provenance of those articles of manufacture vulgarly known as ' Brummagem '.

Though Birmingham was a centre of advanced Radicalism, the opposite view had been represented with sufficient strength to cause riots when the Radicals celebrated the fall of the Bastille with democratic joy. In the movement which resulted in the passing of the Reform Bill only two months earlier the local Political Union had played a conspicuous part, and its supporters were multiplying rapidly enough to swamp the Tory minority almost completely. Nowhere was the atmosphere likely to be more friendly towards the widow and the child of the progressive Duke, " the People's Friend ". Birmingham itself was nothing if not progressive. Already it had run an annual musical festival for more than forty years, and for thirty its factories had been illuminated by gas.

This visit, like all the other visits paid during the tour, was conducted with the ceremonial appropriate to the

presence of a reigning sovereign. Bells were rung, banners displayed. And whenever a Mayor made a speech of welcome, Conroy was prompt in handing out the previously-written reply. Attention was, of course, directed to the lonely situation and maternal cares of the Duchess, and to the importance of the white-clad child by her side. Lehzen was of the party, her dark eyes seldom moving from that childish face. Sometimes, while Mamma was resting from the fatigues of the day, the Baroness would promenade Victoria and Victoire through noblemen's parks or along the more salubrious streets of small Welsh towns.

At Beaumaris, which they reached on August 18, the populace turned out in force to greet the visitors, and they were hailed with royal salutes from the cutter *Emerald* and the steamer *Palmerston* lying at anchor in the bay. Four carriages and fifteen horses had come from Bristol in the *Palmerston*, which was reinforced by two other steamers, the *Llewellyn* and the *Paul Pry*, all thoughtfully mounting guns in order to be ready to fire a salute whenever the word was given. It was given very often.

Boarding the *Emerald*, the Duchess, Princess Victoria, and their suite went on an excursion round Puffin Island, and contemplated the Menai bridge. Cannon had been placed on the pillars of the bridge, and their salvos were answered from below by the cutter and her escort. Caernarvon was the next halt, and there the hills were covered with people and the Craig-y-don yachts fluttering with flags. By the time they reached Llanberis all this noise and excitement had laid the Princess low; but her mother's powers of endurance were greater, and did not fail her even when two thousand rock-cannon, commonly used in blasting operations, thundered at her as her boat "provided by A. T. Smith Esq", moved slowly up the lake. At the stern flew the royal standard, displayed in those waters for the

first time since the reign of Edward I.

Powis Castle and Eaton Hall were on the itinerary during this progress, but the most momentous halt was that made at Plas-Newydd, where there was begun that close friendship between the Duchess of Kent and the Paget family which ended only with her death.

The head of that gay, good-looking tribe was Henry William Paget, first Marquis of Anglesey, that imperturbable person who, when a round-shot passed between him and Wellington at Waterloo, turned and said, "By God, sir, I have lost my leg!" To which the Duke replied with equal sangfroid, "By God, I believe you have!" Twenty-three years later Lord Alfred Paget paid a pious visit to that part of the *morne plaine* where an obelisk marked the resting-place of his father's limb.

Anglesey's third brother, Arthur, afterwards Sir Arthur, Paget, had married Lady Duncannon's sister, *née* Lady Augusta Fane, whom her first husband, Lord Boringdon, divorced on his account in the same year that Anglesey himself — then Lord Paget — eloped with Wellington's niece by marriage, Lady Charlotte Wellesley, *née* Cadogan. There followed the notorious Double Divorce, after which the first Lady Paget married her admirer, the sixth Duke of Argyll, and Paget married Lady Charlotte. In an age when even one divorce in a family stank in austere nostrils the Duchess of Kent showed a broader tolerance. She found the Angleseys charming, as indeed they were. "A more gallant spirit", wrote Greville of the first Marquis, "a finer gentleman, a more honourable and kind-hearted man never existed"; and of his wife it was recorded that though she had very little beauty, her powers of pleasing were "uncommonly great". The whole clan "swarmed like locusts" at Claremont and Kensington Palace until, after providing Queen Victoria with two lovely bridesmaids, they were

quietly ousted by the sobering influence of the Prince Consort. Salutary though that influence may have been it tended to monochrome, and among the patches of colour eliminated few were more brilliant than the Paget patch.

The greater part of the summer and autumn of 1832 was spent by the Duchess ' on tour in the provinces '. If her memory registered even a fraction of her impressions she must have been a living gazetteer. In the matter of beds and bedrooms alone there would be considerable variety, ranging from the regally plumed and canopied splendours of Chatsworth to the modestly curtained tent-bed at Meridon. It was in October that the visit was paid to William, sixth Duke of Devonshire, the ' Bachelor Duke ', once well spoken of as a runner for Princess Charlotte's hand. His elder sister, Lady Georgiana Cavendish, had married Lord Morpeth, afterwards sixth Earl of Carlisle — it was their son whom the Duchess of Kent chose to carry her coronet.

Her Royal Highness's presence was not as yet hedged about by ceremony, for Lady Wharncliffe, who was of the party, wrote three months later of " the comfortable way we got into with Kent and Vicky before they left Chatsworth ", adding, " I am more than ever convinced that what Kings and Queens and Princes like is to see one at one's ease, but dislike formality or vulgar familiarity ". One can only hope that the Duchess did *not* dislike formality, for before a year had passed Conroy had surrounded her with an invisible square of *chevaux de frise*.

Everywhere she had been heartened by signs of public and personal good-will towards herself and the Princess. If it had been otherwise, if she had returned disappointed to Kensington, much of Conroy's work would have been undone. But everything confirmed his views and stiffened her own. What could Cumberland, and his Salic clique, his Orange Lodges, and his Tories do, faced by this massing of

public favour behind the mother of his young niece? Unfortunately she failed to realize that in lending herself to anti-Cumberland manœuvres she was competing with the Crown for popularity — an invidious thing to do. The King showed considerable patience during her earlier progresses, of which the newspaper accounts must every morning have made breakfast at Windsor a squally meal, but in the ensuing year even the mollifying influence of the Queen was not enough. Unconscious of these things, or blind to their import, the Duchess rolled on her way, affable or aloof as Conroy bade. It was not a healthy situation.

The return to Kensington Palace was not made until November, and the last stage of the journey was Oxford, where Mamma received an address presented by the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Rowley, "and answered it", notes Princess Victoria, "as usual — then", adds the Princess without further comment, "Sir John was made Doctor of Civil Law". A hood and gown were an unexpected addition to Conroy's collection of trophies, which included the white robe and green and gold cross of the order of San Benito d'Avis, and the picturesque collars and badges of the Guelphic Order, the Saxon Order of Ernstein, and of the Portuguese Order of the Tower and the Sword. His career had certainly been of the kind which gives a Public Orator something to play with; defender of his country, mighty man of valour, trusted servant of Princes.

At the Palace they — the Duchess and her daughter — "resumed their old rooms", which looked a little shabby after the splendours which they had left behind, and on the evening of their return Lord Liverpool dined with them, and Sir John, with both his daughters, but not Lady Conroy. Later Aunt Sophia came, a fragile little figure with the sight of her fine eyes already beginning to fail.

Christmas was kept with much homely gaiety, and again

Princess Sophia chose to join the party after dinner. There were two large Christmas-trees, hung with lights and sugar ornaments, one tree being appropriated to the Princess's presents and the other to those of the whole Conroy family, who were there in full force. Sir John's choice of gifts is interesting. He gave the Princess a silver brush, and the Duchess a book-holder, an *Annual*, and a dog called ' Flora ', perhaps after Lady Flora Hastings. But there was something wrong with Flora's leg : she had to be taken away to the vet. for treatment, and three weeks later Sir John provided as a substitute the little dog, ' Dash ', which figures so largely in the diaries of the Princess. She herself describes it as " a beautiful spaniel of King Charles's breed ", but the animal with her in the Westall portrait is nothing of the kind, and the pedigree of Dash remains an enigma. Greville noted after Victoria's accession that she had taken an aversion to Sir James Graham because he was "so like Conroy"; and it might have been expected that she would feel little affection for a dog given by the Comptroller to her mother. Yet she became, and remained, almost maudlin about the charms of " dear, sweet little Dashy ", and within three or four years she seems to have forgotten altogether that it was really her mother's pet.

From the beginning of the year 1833 we find frequent entries in the Princess's Diary to the effect that " Sir John " or " Sir J. C." had dined in the Duchess's apartments. Lady Conroy is seldom mentioned, except as making one sometimes in the morning ride or going with the Princess, her own daughters, and Lehzen to the play. She was present, however, at the dinner-party which the Duchess gave on April 24, when the King came, and the Queen " was not well enough to come ". Once more the Dukes of Cumberland and Gloucester were there, and this time good old Sir Frederick Wetherall, the Duke of Kent's friend and principal



SIR JOHN CONROY IN 1827
From the portrait by Fowler
By courtesy of Sir Edward Hanmer, Bart.

legatee, was invited also. The band of the Grenadier Guards played after dinner. Both Sir John and his lady were in attendance on May 8, when the Duchess entertained the Duke of Orleans, eldest son of Louis Philippe, the ill-starred Prince who was killed nine years later in a phaeton accident near the Porte Maillot. "Sir J. C." and "Lady C." are sprinkled all over the Diary at this time. On Victoria's fourteenth birthday Sir John arrived at 10.30 A.M. with his three sons, bearing the "very pretty picture of Dash" which was his gift to her. Lady Conroy's was a sandalwood pincushion and a needle-case, and all five children gave an enamelled watch-chain. Soon more illustrious visitors began to arrive at the Palace; the Queen, the Cumberlands, the Gloucesters, Princess Augusta, Princess Sophia, the Duke of Sussex, all came, "as well as many foreign ministers and their ladies, nobility and gentry". This showed a very proper sense of the importance of the occasion.

The same day the floor of the ballroom at St. James's Palace was "chalked as if for a ball", and baskets of pine-apples and cherries were brought from the royal gardens in preparation for the juvenile ball to which the King and Queen entertained their niece that evening. Again "Sir J. C." is in evidence, attending upon the Duchess. Victoire was among the young guests, and nothing could have been on the surface more friendly and gay than this assemblage of boys and girls gathered to honour the Princess of Kent. Two good-looking boys who, but for the Princess's existence, might have had the one a certain prospect and the other a sporting chance of bearing the title of 'George V', danced with her. They were George of Cumberland and George of Cambridge. Her third and only other partner was the son of Prince and Princess Lieven, an interesting choice, for it had just become known that the Tsar had recalled his Ambassador to the Court of St. James's and the

Lievens were under the deepest shadow that can fall upon any diplomatic career. The Duchess of Kent was inclined to be friendly towards the Princess, in spite of the warnings of Prince Leopold that she was a dangerous *intrigante* — as indeed she was. That very morning a leader-writer in *The Times* had declared roundly that " there never figured on the Courtly stage a female intriguer more restless, more arrogant, more mischievous . . . than this supercilious Ambassadress " : but she was a devoted mother to the five sons of whom only two survived her. A month later she was writing to Earl Grey that the squabbles which were going on in Kensington Palace did not surprise her. " The cause ", she remarked, " is that German *morgue* and little-mindedness which are rampant in that quarter. Those people are wrong-headed to the utmost possible degree, all of which, however, is a great pity, for, after all, the future of England is placed in their hands."

The future of England, in the person of Princess Victoria, was only indirectly moulded by hands of so little wisdom. Not even Princess Lieven could guess at that early stage how behind that small Hanoverian face a mind shaped not by the Duchess and Conroy but by Lehzen and the Princess herself was already beginning to assume the outline which time and the Prince Consort filled in. But it was a pity that a childhood so pregnant should have been passed in an atmosphere so charged with suspicion. Even the amiable if mildly eccentric Duke of Sussex did not escape, and it is significant that the Princess was anxious that he should. On one occasion, just as he was about to withdraw from a children's ball at Gloucester House, she ran up to him and said, " Won't you give me a kiss before you go ? " As he inclined his massive figure to obey she took the opportunity to whisper in his ear, " You have forgotten to say Good-night to Mamma ". It was not a happy state of things.

Like all the Coburgs, the Duchess of Kent practised an almost Semitic faithfulness to the family. She never wearied of receiving her sisters and brothers and their sons and daughters, and the visit paid to her in June 1833 by her two tall nephews, the Princes Alexander and Ernest of Würtemberg, marked a turn for the worse in her relations with the long-suffering King and Queen. With characteristic kindliness Adelaide gave a juvenile ball at St. James's and invited the whole contingent. Either with or without the approval of Mamma, Victoria sat the whole evening beside the Queen, and did not dance at all. "She seemed to retain her former affection for her," wrote Lady Bedingfield, "which gratified the Queen."

The Royal Family were seated in a row of gilded chairs, on a dais and under a canopy; and Adelaide, "to please the Duchess", asked her to bring her nephews to sit beside her, in order that she might make their acquaintance. With incredible ungraciousness the Duchess declined, refusing at the same time on their behalf an invitation to stay some days at Windsor. Perhaps with some perception that the young Princess was distressed by this incident, she firmly removed her from the ball long before it was over, on the plea that she was fatigued. The Queen knew well that her niece was often allowed to remain at the opera till a much later hour, but with extreme forbearance she said that she hoped the Duchess would, at least, leave her nephews: to which the aunt replied that they had been at a review and were very fatigued. So the rest of the distinguished company, old and young, watched Her Royal Highness withdrawing, with the inscrutable Princess at her side, and her two remarkably stalwart-looking nephews in tow.

These easily-fatigued young gentlemen had accompanied their aunt and cousin to the opera to hear in one single evening Pasta in Act II of *Norma* and Malibran in the

last Act of *Otello*, to see Taglioni and Fanny Elsler dance in *La Sylphide*, and to see and hear Paganini play some variations " most wonderfully ". Nor was it considered that the strain of a journey to Portsmouth and a series of civic functions there and at Southampton would be too much for them.

Conroy went ahead in a postchaise to Portsmouth, where the rest of the party joined him on board the *Emerald*. They arrived at Cowes at 7 P.M., and drove up in an ordinary fly to the sham medieval fortalice of Norris Castle. The range of the Duchess's experience continued to widen, not always in agreeable directions. The fly of 1833 was a ramshackle, dreary vehicle, reeking of damp straw, and drawn by horses only fit for the knacker's yard.

In the neighbourhood of Norris Castle the Conroys had a cottage, looking over the Solent and admirably situated for anyone who loved to see the ships come sailing in. Here again one might have expected that Princess Victoria's unchanging sentiments towards Sir John would colour her later views ; but it was upon the site of this cottage that, as Queen, she laid out the Osborne estate and built herself a nondescript though slightly Italianate " marine residence ".

Cowes, a gay little place chosen as its headquarters by the Royal Yacht Club in the year of Waterloo, was by now well provided with bow-fronted lodging-houses, crab-and-lobster stalls, shops selling local shell- or pebble-work, and conventicles of several denominations — all the adjuncts which appeared as if by spontaneous generation whenever fashion decreed that any small town should be a ' resort '. It was not the Duchess's first visit. She had graced the Isle of Wight in the previous year, when at the King's behest Lord Adolphus FitzClarence, commander of the royal yacht, had written to place the vessel at her disposal, and she

had troubled to thank neither His Majesty nor him, though she *did* condescend to make use of the yacht.

All the Conroy sons except Stephen figured constantly in the cruises and other expeditions during the summer of 1833, and their mother went out riding fairly often with the rest, "sedentary" on a horse instead of in an armchair. Sea trips were in vogue. The *Emerald*, to which the young Princess became sentimentally attached, was much in request, and surprised gunners in the naval and shore batteries at Southampton and Plymouth found themselves getting a great deal of practice in the firing of royal salutes.

After this summer one does not hear much about the younger Conroys, with the exception of Victoire. They were growing up, and moving out of the picture. Edward was at Christ Church, Oxford, where he graduated M.A. a year later. As the Princess's senior by ten years he must have seemed to her the most remote. Commenting on the family group painted by William Fowler in 1823 he wrote, "my own Portrait makes me an affectionate Muff of a boy, but thank Heaven I did not grow up one". Aboard the *Emerald* at Plas Newydd a year before Victoria had given him a pencil sketch of a horse done by herself, receiving in exchange some drawings of his own.

By getting into "a very fast set" neither Edward nor Stephen Conroy, nor their younger brother, the turf-haunting Henry, would necessarily have damned themselves in the eyes of the Duchess, who looked indulgently at the equally gay young Pagets. It is even possible that a slightly sentimental friendship between Victoria and one or other of his tall sons may have been part of Conroy's scheme for dominating the Princess. Nothing need have come of it; but it was probably the Duchess who discouraged the visits of these equally handsome but less nobly-born young men, to whom early associations had given a fortuitous family

status. If he had any designs in that direction they were deflected. He himself was probably shrewd enough to perceive that the Whig peers would look with anything but joy upon any compromising episodes. Scandalous stories clung round several of the now-elderly Princesses, and the Nonconformist conscience must be respected. Whatever mistakes the Duchess may have made, she was wise when she kept her daughter at her side night and day. If the unruly Hanoverian blood should begin to stir, let it not be until her tutelage was over. She was once accused of trying to turn the Princess into a snowdrop, but even a less intelligent woman would have been aware that the best she could hope for was a rosebud of a not too startling pink. The docility of the child, her apparently spontaneous response to pious influences, her demure and ingenuous face, counted for nothing ; just such had Aunt Sophia and Aunt Amelia been at her age, and Aunt Elizabeth only a fraction less virginal.

On July 12, 1833, the Duchess took leave with much emotion of her two Würtemberg nephews. Three weeks later she went to Plymouth aboard the *Emerald*, in order that the Mayor and Corporation should present her with an address, and that Victoria should give its new colours to the 89th Regiment. The journey was not uneventful. Both Lehzen and the Duchess were very sick as the cutter was towed into the harbour, where she ran foul of a hulk and broke her mainmast. Rather unfeelingly the Princess sat on deck enjoying a mutton chop while her mother and governess lay groaning below.

At Plymouth the royal party dined in public, with the blinds up, for the edification of the loyal populace, which thronged to this free entertainment in large numbers. Conroy would have made an admirable film-producer. He had a curious flair for a good 'shot', and knew exactly what

sights and what phrases would reach the large heart of the vulgar. At centres of industry the royal reply to the loyal speech would dwell upon the importance of commerce to the country: at naval and military harbours or garrison towns another note must be struck. Too much had better not be said about the Duke of Kent in the character of soldier; his military career had not been such as to render him popular with all ranks. But it was a good thought to remark that the Princess's study of English history had "infused her with martial ardour". A good thought and a true saying, for this bland-looking child was to grow into the woman who wrote so proudly of 'her' soldiers and 'her' army, and was so jealous for the honour and so earnest for the well-being of her armed forces.

The doings of the Duchess during this summer were followed closely at Windsor, where recollections of her rudeness to his son Adolphus over the offer of the royal yacht two years before may have inflamed the King's annoyance over her progresses by land and sea, and "the continual popping in the way of salutes to H.R.H." A less choleric man than William IV might have resented these things, and it must be admitted that he had shown surprising patience. Lord Adolphus was not prepossessing; he had, said Sarah, Lady Lyttelton, "a strange sort of slouching eye-lid to one of his eyes and vast pouch-like chops"; but he was the sailor son of a sailor father; he was devoted to Queen Adelaide; and he had carried out courteously and punctiliously the King's instructions concerning the royal yacht at Cowes in 1831, when the only reaction forthcoming was a curt note from Conroy to the yacht's boatswain, with instructions as to the time and place when the vessel would be needed. That was bad enough. But by 1832 and 1833 the Duchess's way of comporting herself had begun to get on the King's nerves, and every fresh piece of intelligence

made matters worse. He notified both the Admiralty and the War Office that the firing of salutes in honour of his sister-in-law must cease.

The heads of those departments, Sir James Graham and Lord Hill, collogued with Earl Grey on the subject, and they agreed among themselves that it would be more prudent not to let it reach the stage of an Order in Council. Could not the Duchess be prevailed upon to forgo " the continual popping " ? Might it not be made to look as if she did this of her own accord ? It would surely be simple for her to signify that as all the sea trips of that summer were " for her amusement ", she would rather not be saluted " whenever she appeared ".

Negotiations were set on foot to this end, but came to nothing. The Duchess — or, what amounted to the same thing, Conroy — proved adamant. Sir John had the impudence to write and say that " as H.R.H.'s *confidential adviser* he could not recommend her to give way on this point ". And the King by an Order in Council altered the regulations upon which she based her claim. Henceforth no vessel was to be saluted unless the King or the Queen were on board.

Small minds are fretted by small matters. On the face of it there was nothing of much moment in this question of the artillery salute, and it is odd to find the Duchess clinging to it as minor Indian potentates cling to their ruffle of drums. Her attitude is explicable only on the assumption that Conroy represented the King's action as part of a sinister plan to detract from her dignity in the eyes of the world.

Two months later the perplexed Queen unburdened herself to Lady Bedingfield. She and the Duchess of Kent had formerly been like sisters, and were still, said Adelaide, very friendly when they met ; but the Duchess met her as seldom as possible, and when she did, named her own hour, so that

if it did not suit the Queen she could make it an excuse for not calling at all. Formerly when, as Duchess of Clarence, the Queen visited her sister-in-law at Kensington, "she sought her in all the Rooms familiarly till she found her, and the Dss of Kent did the same to her, and", added Lady Bedingfield, "does so still; but when the Queen calls on the Duchess she is made to stop in some particular Room till the Dss makes her appearance. She seems to wish to be on great form."

Anything more petty and ungracious than the Duchess's conduct it would be difficult to conceive; and it was madly foolish as well, for William rightly resented the snubs administered to "this superior-minded Princess", and few doubts could have been entertained at Windsor as to their real source. Conroy seems to have lost his head altogether.

At Kensington he and Lady Conroy were constantly in the picture during the autumn and winter of the same year. They were both present, in attendance on the Duchess, when Mr. T. Griffiths lectured on physics for the benefit of the fourteen-year-old Victoria, and also three days later when Mr. Walker discoursed upon the properties of matter. Seldom can scientific gentlemen have spoken to a more curiously assorted audience: the small, fair-haired girl, the dark, carmine-cheeked mother, the arrogant Irishman with the jutting nose and his long, languid wife. The fair-haired girl had a note-book and a pencil, and made earnest jottings; near her, the swarthy face of Lehzen was raised attentively to the table on which "curious and interesting experiments" were performed.

The faithful if slightly fatuous Spaeth was no longer in the background. She was now Lady-in-Waiting to Princess Feodore, and far away in Germany. If the story told by Wellington to Greville has any tincture of truth, she had

remonstrated with the Duchess on the subject of "some familiarities" which the young Princess had observed between her mother and Conroy. And so "they" got rid of her; and would have got rid of Lehzen too, if "they" had been able.

CHAPTER VIII

'HAIL, GRACIOUS KENT AND VICTORIA'[1]

NOTHING could have suited Conroy's book worse than any sort of *entente* between Windsor and Kensington. It was better that the Duchess should be fretted by imagined slights and harassed by vain fears. Enigmatic though the Princess was, the Comptroller probably divined that she still felt what he would regard as an undesirable degree of affection for her uncle and aunt. It was certainly well that a sequence of family visits in the spring of 1834 should distract both the Duchess and her.

The first visitor was Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg, whom the Duchess had not seen for sixteen years. With him came her son Prince Charles, now married to Countess Klebelsberg and completely restored to his mother's favour. Fortunately his wife was inoffensive and discreet, though she had to bear the blame for the breakdown of their marriage many years later. In June followed "dearest Feo", with her husband and her two eldest children, Charles and Eliza; "the boy", noted their Aunt Victoria, "very tall, sweet-tempered and nice-looking, but not handsome; Eliza a *perfect* little beauty, with immense dark brown eyes and light brown hair".

"It was", wrote Princess Feodore to Queen Victoria twenty-six years later, "one of dear Mamma's charming characteristics to have kept so much youthful feeling about

[1] Legend on a Tunbridge Wells transparency, 1834.

her"; and Princess Alice remembered her as "so dear, so kind, so merry". There could hardly have been a more delightful grandmamma, save for one thing. She did not consider that children should be allowed "to eat their fill", and more than once we hear of compassionate Ladies-in-Waiting feeding by stealth the hungry young visitors upon whom this edict had been imposed. With her enormous collection of bibelots, glittering in their nests of silver paper, and her large family of dogs, wax-bills, and parakeets, hers was just the sort of environment which would enchant any child. This, surely, was the real woman, and the bouncing, arrogant, limelight-hunting Duchess of Conroy's creation only a changeling somehow made to deputize for her.

On the morrow of Princess Feodore's departure the whole party went to visit the King and Queen at Windsor. It was Ascot Week. The castle and the town had taken on that air of gaiety which had graced them once a year ever since Queen Anne had instituted the races. Lehzen and Lady Flora Hastings, incompatible and mutually suspicious, were in attendance on the Duchess. The hand of Lady Flora would have made a startling study for any Romany sybil if it was already written on her palm that five years later the tragedy of her death would cause the girl Queen to be hooted upon that same racecourse. There were several reasons why Lehzen should dislike this Scottish lady, who, though not yet thirty (she was born in 1806), had already something of the angularity of feature and caustic quality of wit not infrequently observed in the well-born spinsters of that country. Lady Flora's was a complex character. She wrote verses described by an admiring compatriot as reflecting a mind at once "pious, pure, amiable and accomplished"; when undeserved scandal touched her name, she showed a restraint which her family found it impossible to imitate; but she was on terms of the gayest friendliness with Conroy,

with whom she was heard to bandy flippant jests at the expense of the Baroness Lehzen. Side by side, under plumed bonnets and tasselled parasols, they took part in the royal drive to Ascot, the two women in whom the destiny of Sir John Conroy was so strangely tied up.

Among the Conroy papers is a note to the effect that Princess Victoria's favourite mount was a chestnut mare called 'Taglioni', won from her uncle the King "in a bet at Ascot". This may have been the occasion, and it is pleasant to think that the strained relations between His Majesty and his sister-in-law did not preclude a friendly flutter with his niece.

One English resort which seems to have attracted the Duchess was Tunbridge Wells, which she visited in the late summer of 1834 and on various other occasions, staying now at Mount Pleasant House, afterwards the Calverley Hotel, now at Boyne House on Mount Ephraim. The inhabitants showed very correct sentiments. Little girls dressed in white strewed flowers before the royal carriage the first time, and the shops along the Pantiles were loyally illuminated. Mr. Neal, the wine merchant, was held to have hit off the prevailing sentiments neatly in his particular 'transparency'. This represented the rising sun with a crown in the centre, with the motto *Dieu et Mon Droit*, "and in the hollow of the luminary, in flaming characters, '*Hail, Gracious Kent and Victoria!*'" It will be observed that this right-minded vintner put first things first. Then the local Yeomanry held a Tournament in honour of the visitors "in the beautiful grounds of Bishop's Down Grove", now the Spa Hotel, marching, countermarching, and manœuvring no doubt with that air of stolid desperation once characteristic of the British amateur soldier.

On one of these visits to Tunbridge Wells the Duchess brought a small parakeet from an itinerant vendor. The

breeding of pet birds was becoming a popular industry, and one fancier advertised his canaries as "not only *chaste* and *elegant* but *classical*".

Little time was given to the Princess to settle down to her studies at Kensington. In November they were all off to St. Leonards, where they stayed at 57 Marina, and the whole Conroy family dined with the Duchess on the night of their arrival. Six fishermen in rough blue jackets, red caps, and coarse white aprons, preceded by a band, came to offer the royal visitors "a basket decorated with flowers and full of fish": and there was soon the inevitable presentation of an address by His Worship the Mayor. On the 11th occurred that carriage accident which, if it had been fatal instead of slight, might so curiously have changed the course of the next few years, either for the Duchess or for her daughter. They were driving, attended by Lady Flora and Lehzen, in a closed landau with a postillion and two horses. The led horse took fright, began to kick, and got entangled in the traces, pulling the postillion's horse down. That animal struggled on to its legs again, but the other remained kicking on the chalky road — an agitating if not a perilous moment. Two gentlemen, a parson called Gould, and a Sussex squire called Pelham Micklethwaite, "very civilly" came and held the head of the prone horse, while the ladies got out "as fast as possible". For whom was the Duchess's first thought the Princess's Diary does not make it clear; but in the mind of the most important person there Dashy seemed more important than any of the others, Dashy, who was in the rumble and whom, when the footman lifted him out, the Princess seized in her arms before she ran wildly on, "calling Mamma to follow". Mr. Micklethwaite, having been slightly injured by the kicking horse, was considered to have qualified for a baronetcy, but the parson, having received no damage, gleaned no reward.

On the return of the party to Kensington Palace they found that what the Princess calls "our bedroom", *i.e.* the one occupied by herself and her mother, had been newly papered and furnished. Someone — the Comptroller would be the obvious person — was beginning to concern himself with the incongruous shabbiness of the Kent apartments, though the time had not come when they were to be multiplied as well as beautified with a bold hand — and without the King's knowledge or consent.

All through the winter and spring of 1834–35 an open rupture between Kensington and the Court was with difficulty avoided. Whether Conroy really wished things to come to this pass it is difficult to say. He must have known that, if pushed too far, the King, whom he compared to "a turkey-cock with its nerves inflamed by green tea", would blow up in one great final explosion of wrath. The deluded Comptroller may have imagined that if this should happen he could rally public sympathy behind the Duchess. Things were looking up in the Kensington Shadow Cabinet in 1834, when one of its members, Lord Duncannon, entered the actual Cabinet as Home Secretary in the newly-formed administration of his brother-in-law, Lord Melbourne. It is true that Lord Grey's successor held office on that occasion only for four months, and that difficulties arose which compelled the King to adopt the usual course of a British sovereign in a dilemma, and "send for the Duke". The Duke came, but would not take office except during the three weeks necessary to enable the next Premier, Sir Robert Peel, to return from Italy. Then the political whirligig revolved again, and Melbourne came back in 1835, almost as if divinely ordained to stand at the elbow of the Queen two years later.

There was satisfaction among the tea-cups at Kensington whenever the Whigs were in power. Conroy, with an eye

to the immediate as well as the more remote future, cultivated the good-will of Melbourne, who was disposed at first to be friendly and might well have lost any chance of royal favour in the next reign if he had continued to respond to the Comptroller's overtures. The possibility of a Regency — or an extension of the Regency provided by the Act of 1830 — was once more being canvassed behind the scenes.

In the meantime a breach had been made in the Coburg circle. In July 1835 Sophie, Countess Mensdorff-Pouilly, died "in a wretched little village in Bohemia". By her romantic marriage with the French *émigré*, Count Emmanuel Mensdorff-Pouilly, she was the mother of four children, and it was to visit her youngest son Arthur in his garrison that she had gone from Prague to that remote spot. It was the Mensdorff-Pouillys who formed one of the Popish *blocs* which caused Melbourne to remark in 1839 that if he were to stress the Protestantism of the Coburg family it might be objected that "many of them had collapsed into Catholicism". Another person who might have been mentioned was Uncle Leopold, who, though without formally recanting the faith in which he had been bred, arrived at a concordat with the Church of Rome upon accepting the crown of Belgium in 1831.

The Duchess was greatly distressed when letters arrived from her brother Ernest describing their sister's death "in a poor sort of cottage", and her burial in the vault of the Elisabetherin nuns at Kaden, in Bohemia. Two regiments of soldiers followed the coffin, their bands playing funeral music, and all the nuns took part in the procession, carrying lighted tapers. Whatever the Duchess's own religious orientation may have been, she was more free from anti-Catholic bias than some of her friends might have wished, and it was not the thought of a beloved sister being laid to rest with Romish rites that caused her pain.

Countess Mensdorff-Pouilly had visited England a few years before, and had spent a week with the Duchess. Victoria remembered her, amiable and ailing, and noted in the Diary " all Mamma's relations are dear to me ".

The correspondence between the King of the Belgians and his young niece — now in full swing — is curious for more reasons than one. Obviously on his side it was a deliberate instrument for tightening the hold which he knew himself to have obtained over that still plastic but now gradually hardening mind. No preoccupations, regal, political, or dynastic, were allowed to interrupt the flow of letters, covering a wide range of subjects yet skilfully framed to sustain the attention of so youthful a correspondent. But on her side it is not clear how far the letters are spontaneous and how far dictated, or, if dictated, by whom. Mamma, perhaps? But the allusions to Mamma are meagre and few, and already in 1834–35 there are indications that subjects were being discussed between uncle and niece of which Mamma would have deprecated the mention. Was the exchange clandestine? That could hardly be. What seems likely is that to Lehzen the superintendence of the Princess's letter-writing activities was entrusted by the unsuspicious Duchess. "Say everything that is kind to the good Lehzen", the King of the Belgians was wont to write. So astute an observer, even at long range, could hardly fail to mark that Lehzen was a valuable ally.

Mamma, too, was corresponding with her brother, to whom she wrote a long letter on the morrow of Victoria's confirmation in July. The Princess's Diary records the presence, among others, of Ernest, Duke of Cumberland, and Aunt Sophia, but the Conroys are not mentioned. Upon this solemn occasion the Duchess marked her continued approval of Lehzen's conduct and services by giving

her " a very pretty bracelet ". On the following Sunday five persons knelt in turn on the crimson velvet cushions in the Palace chapel to receive the Holy Sacrament, all in love and charity with their neighbours or else partaking of the solemn rite to their own eternal damnation. They were the Duchess, her daughter, Sir John Conroy, Lady Flora Hastings, and Lehzen.

More progresses marked the summer which followed, more addresses, speeches, deputations, country house visits, bows, smiles, and general popularity-hunting, though no more " continual popping ". It was a harassing year for the King, who disapproved passionately of the Militia Bill then before Parliament, but was even more excited by this conduct on the part of his sister-in-law. Ignition point had very nearly been reached now, and a preliminary spark flew up at His Majesty's birthday dinner on August 21. On that occasion the King, replying to the toast of his health, expressed a hope that his successor would be of age when she mounted the throne. " I have ", said he, " a great respect for the Person upon whom in the event of my death the Regency would devolve, but I have a great distrust of the persons by whom she is surrounded."

Royal indiscretion could hardly have plunged deeper, and the persons in question may have felt mildly amused by the naïve implications of the royal prayer. What would it matter whether the Princess were fifteen or sixteen, seventeen or eighteen, when she succeeded? If the worst happened, and she were technically of age, Parliament would have to be persuaded to extend the term of the Regency. Melbourne would see to it; or, if not Melbourne, another. Who could doubt that the mild, girlish, ductile Princess would be only too thankful to walk hand in hand with dear Mamma as long as public opinion would permit her to do so?

The itinerary of 1835 took the travellers north, south, east, and west. They stayed at Bishopsthorpe with the Archbishop of York, a member of the Vernon Harcourt family which had given such faithful servants and friends to George III and Queen Charlotte: they heard the *Messiah* in York Minster: to prevent any possible jealousy, they also went to Canterbury, where the Mayor and Corporation presented the inevitable loyal address, but there was no oratorio. Among the great houses graced by the presence of the Duchess and her daughter were Belvoir, Burghley, and Holkham Hall. At each of the last two a touch of comedy — or, perhaps, farce — relieved the solemnity of the scene. At Burghley during dinner a pail of ice was landed in the Duchess's lap, "which made a great bustle". At Holkham the royal ladies were late in arriving, owing to the fervour of the King's Lynn navvies, who insisted on taking out the horses and pulling the carriage round the quaint little town. Their host, that bucolic paladin, Coke of Norfolk, waited anxiously for them as dusk deepened. And then a carriage-and-four, with an escort of Yeomanry, clattered up to the main door. Out came Mr. Coke, an impressive and still active octogenarian, with a lighted candle in either hand, bowing low as he came. "When he resumed his erect position," recorded Lord Albemarle, "the objects of his homage had vanished. They were the dressers."

Great things were not expected from royal ladies in the way of conversation, and it may be doubted whether the Duchess's still limited English equipment included what Horace Walpole called the "language of turneps and fox-hounds"; but she would have no difficulty in understanding the enthusiastic old gentleman when he praised the winning demeanour of the Princess, nor in finding suitable words in which to express her pleasure. Whatever Coke thought of

Conroy, the two would have plenty of topics to discuss. The Comptroller was keen on farming, and hunted whenever he got the chance. More than once the Duchess enjoyed the privilege of seeing him in pink, attending a hunt breakfast or moving off with a highly interested field. She herself did not hunt, nor did she allow her daughter to do so, but, with Lehzen and Lady Conroy, they both continued their regular rides.

In October they were all at Ramsgate, staying in "a small but very nice house overlooking the sea", and awaiting the arrival of the King and Queen of the Belgians, who had engaged a suite of rooms at the Albion Hotel. Mr. Thomas Raikes, reading in the newspapers that Their Majesties had arrived "in a steamboat without any retinue", shook his head with grave misgiving. "The sovereigns of the present day", he wrote, "will soon travel about by stage-coach."

It was the first meeting between the Duchess and her French sister-in-law, twenty-eight years younger than herself. Leopold had sent such a careful word-picture of his Queen that few surprises can have been reserved for his sister. She was no beauty. It was from her that their son Leopold II of abominable memory inherited his flat forehead and his long, obstinate-looking nose — not the Coburg nose, which is undulating and sensitive. But she was amiable, poor Louise-Marie; she valued "goodness, virtue and merit more than beauty", which was fortunate, as she possessed the first and not the last; and she played the harp without being very fond of music. It was hardly possible that anyone so colourless could displease her newly-found 'in laws'; but she did more than please her new niece. When she died fifteen years later the Prince Consort wrote of her a little hyperbolically that she was Victoria's "only confidante, her only friend".

Across the Duchess's modest seaside dinner-table the two men confronted each other who hoped to hold the helm when the new reign should begin; Leopold, who centred his schemes on Victoria; Conroy, whose choice was Victoria's Mamma. Neither of them had penetrated behind that blonde mask, but each thought that he had, one finding a character just strong enough to be good wood to carve, the other — just nothing. Leopold had, however, some inkling as to how things stood. Two years later he wrote to the young Queen, " the irksome position in which you have lived will have the merit to have given you habits of discretion and prudence ". So the irksomeness of the position was becoming increasingly apparent in proportion as Victoria's years made it more strange that she should be suppressed. Great play, of course, was made in public with the now practical certainty that she was, as the Recorder of Stamford put it, " destined to mount the throne of these realms ". The parenthetical " I hope at some distant date " in her mother's speeches deceived nobody. But it cannot be denied that the Duke of Cumberland, who had no inkling of the Princess's real character, had some cause for apprehension when he looked ahead. The country must, it seemed, fall into the clutches either of a pinchbeck Coburg upstart or a flashy Irish adventurer. Meanwhile the supposed puppet of dear Mamma was quietly discussing home and foreign affairs with the King of the Belgians, and writing in her Diary that she could never sufficiently repay dear Lehzen for all she had " *borne* and done " for her.

King Leopold returned to his kingdom leaving Conroy in possession of at least a portion of the field. And on January 13 — an unlucky date as events proved — the Kents returned to Kensington Palace.

Little thinking of the storm which their removal would raise, the Princess noted in her journal with transparent

satisfaction that on their arrival at the Palace they went up *two* staircases to their " new sleeping and sitting apartments — very lofty and handsome ". The room which the Duchess had high-handedly appropriated for herself and the Princess is described as large *and* lofty. " Then comes a little room for the maid and a dressing-room for Mamma ; then comes the old gallery which is partitioned into three large, lofty, fine and cheerful rooms." This was the Great Gallery, built by William of Orange. The partitions remained until the reign of Edward VII.

With that touch of sentimentality which remained part of her nature to the end, the Princess went down into her " poor former sitting-room ", which she could not help looking at with affection ; " but ", she added, " our new rooms are much more airy and roomy ". From her collection of pictures she eliminated " two ugly oil paintings " of her father and mother, but she added " Hayter's drawing of Mamma and I ". Her pleasure was unclouded by the knowledge that the move had been made not only without the necessary permission of the King but against his express commands, conveyed to the Duchess when she had made an application for these apartments in the previous year.

The whole episode was deplorable, and forms one of the worst items in the indictment against the Duchess and her Comptroller ; but it was not quite as bad as represented in *Victoria, Queen and Ruler*. There it is stated that the rooms had only just become vacant owing to the death of the King's daughter, Lady de Lisle, who held the post of Housekeeper at the Palace, and that " as soon as the body was removed, the Duchess took possession ". As Lady de Lisle did not die until April 10, 1837, after assuming her duties only a few weeks before, it is clear that the King was spared this additional source of irritation.

There had been for some time in the English press a

strong anti-Coburg note, which grew louder every time a member of the detested clan set foot upon English ground. It must be admitted that they set foot there with some perseverance. In March came Uncle Ferdinand, who had been there only two years before. This time he brought his sons Ferdinand and Augustus, the former on his way to Portugal to marry the youthful widowed Queen, Maria da Gloria, and incidentally to gather up yet another sheaf into the Coburg granary. The young Queen had visited England in 1833, and had been present at the Court ball from which her future Coburg cousins-in-law had been so abruptly swept away by their aunt. For the second time, the much-enduring King and Queen invited the Duchess to bring her nephews to Windsor, and now no obstacle was placed in the way of acceptance. Ferdinand was a personable youth, "better-looking and more intelligent than Augustus", and both William and Adelaide had the generosity to show that they liked him. The Queen, the Duchess, Ferdinand, and Princess Victoria all went in one carriage to a meet of the staghounds, and watched while the carted stag was let loose. Relations between Windsor and Kensington seemed a little better; but this was merely

The torrent's smoothness ere it dash below.

Nobody had told His Majesty — perhaps nobody had dared tell him — about the Duchess's appropriation of rooms at Kensington more in number and larger in size than those reluctantly conceded by George IV. Adelaide's influence, and her desire, shared by the King, that there should be between them and their sister-in-law no breach so wide that it would separate them irrevocably from the niece who was dear to them both, averted the worst a little longer. And in the meantime the doings of the Kensington *camarilla* were attracting attention and causing comment, and in June

John Gibson Lockhart was perturbed by the activities of the German historian Friedrich Ludwig Georg von Raumer, who had visited England in the previous year and, with a celerity worthy of Count Smorltork, had written a book about the country and its institutions. Raumer's theories found favour with Leopold and were equally acceptable to the Durham-Duncannon-Conroy clique. According to Lockhart, in a letter to John Wilson Croker, efforts were being made " by Raumer and others bitten with Continental notions to impress the mind of the Dss of Kent with the belief that the Crown here might gain and not lose by the degradation of the Noble Estate of our legislature ". Even more alarming than Raumer was Lord Durham, who was suspected of contemplating being England's real King himself, " under the shelter of a petticoat, on the effectual swamping of the English peerage " — so nearly swamped in the tempest of the Reform Bill four years earlier.

" The Duchess ", wrote Lockhart, " is mad enough to look for support here and to the popery and radicalism on which the throne of Brussels rests " ; and he hints at the " perverted jealousy of those likely to give the rule to the mind of the next sovereign ". In his not unnatural alarm he was surely ascribing to the Duchess a far greater degree of intelligence than she possessed. Nothing that we know of her suggests the *précieuse.* There is no trace of any serious philosophical or political discussions between her and her advisers, any anxiety on their part lest she should conceive ideas running counter to their own, or be converted to some creed inimical to their projects. Nor does it seem likely that she would set herself seriously to study the ingenious works of the learned Professor of Political Science in the University of Berlin. It is true that she deprecated novel-reading, but Lord Liverpool had recommended her to read — and caused the Princess to read — the works of his friend Miss

Martineau, "especially her charming *Taxation Tales*, in which the soundest principles of political economy were agreeably conveyed into the mind in narrative form", and any attempt to colour such ideas as she had — or was capable of having — would be made in some such easily assimilated form.

Radicals and Papists seem odd bedfellows, but no bed unites more incongruous elements than does self-interest. The Dissenters and the Reformers, like the Catholics, looked to the new reign "not as men without hope". At one extreme of the pro-Kent party stood the sober Benthamites; at the other, the flamboyant O'Connellites. It may have been to please the Irish wing that in June 1836 the Duchess subscribed £20 towards the completion of the new Catholic cathedral at Tuam, but her sympathies had taken shape seven years before, when Wellington piloted the Emancipation Bill through the Lords. Her mother, the Dowager Duchess, was of the same mind, and wrote to her at that time, "In spite of your great prudence, my dear, I must speak of politics — namely, that which interests me — the Emancipation! . . . It is very right in the hero of the Peninsula to stand up so manfully for that which he commenced with so much judgment." Lord Anglesey was then Lord Lieutenant, and his attitude, while suggesting to the detached mind of the Duke that he had been "bit by a mad Papist", was such as to commend itself to the royal lady who had found passionate supporters in Daniel O'Connell and his Catholic Association.

Only one other member of the Kent clique subscribed to the Tuam fund. This was Lord Morpeth, now Chief Secretary for Ireland in Melbourne's administration.

So short a time had passed since Catholics had been relieved of their political disabilities, and Popery was still regarded by masses of the people with such profound dis-

trust, the donation of the Duchess was more liberal than wise. Militant Protestantism had found a perfervid champion in Ernest, Duke of Cumberland, behind whom were solidly ranged the Orange Lodges, with a large membership among Army officers. Though guiltless of the more sinister ideas attributed to him, Cumberland was not unnaturally alarmed at every fresh piece of evidence that his sister-in-law was Romishly inclined, and this alarm was sharpened by the polite attentions paid to her and her daughter by the Catholic Association. It would have been a point scored for the Salic party if it could be demonstrated that her religious views made her, *ipso facto*, a person unfit either to have charge of the Heiress Presumptive or herself to fill the office of Regent.

At the time of the Duchess's death Lady Caroline Barrington told Miss Victoria Stuart-Wortley about the " extraordinary reports " going round that she had " died a Roman Catholic ". The rumour of her conversion had never died, and is not dead now. Oral tradition declares that she smuggled away her grandson, the future Edward VII, and had him baptized by a priest of the old faith. Such things are hard to disprove. But if she *did* ' vert ' two points seem curious : that the influence of Conroy, an Irish and therefore a bigoted Protestant, did not wane ; and that no attempt was made to modify the austerely Protestant line of the Princess's training.

" I do not suppose ", wrote Archbishop Randall Davidson, in discussing the doctrinal side of that training, " that her mother had much religion in her character, though ", he added, with a tardy remembrance of his calling, " perhaps I have no right to say so." He had none. And his predecessor in the Deanery of Windsor, Dr. Wellesley, could have convinced him of his error. The Duchess's was not a restless intelligence groping for an acceptable sectarian

formula; her mental equipment was so modest that one shrewd observer marvelled at the regard in which she was held by her son-in-law, "who was supposed to put intellect and reasoning powers above all". "How childlike, beautiful, simple and transparent a soul!" wrote Lady Augusta Bruce. "The dear Baroness always used to say that the Duchess had preserved the religion, and delicacy of conscience, and *simplicity* of a child. . . . I think," remarked Lady Augusta, later, from her own observation, "that the beloved Duchess was never quite at home with English sermons and services." Surely no one to whom the Anglican Church of that period seemed too artificial would be likely to respond to the complex and opulent stimulus of the Roman ritual; though it might of course be argued on the other side that the lack of 'at-homeness' in her later years was due to an unacknowledged change of allegiance. "The dear Baroness" was Spaeth, who had known her mistress well in her Lutheran days, and who probably shared her preference for primitive austerity and improvised prayer.

How is it possible to find a common denominator for the Duchess as Stockmar, Lady Augusta Stanley, and Lady Flora Hastings saw her, "naturally cheerful and friendly," "devoted, sensitive", "the noblest of women", and the arrogant, intransigent being whose conduct distressed Queen Adelaide and infuriated King William? It can only be done on the hypothesis, already suggested, that the latter was the fugitive creation of Conroy, wrought by him out of her own fears and affections, out of her dread of Cumberland, her regard for her husband's memory, and her undoubted love for their daughter. The real woman was, as it were, occluded for ten years. It needed a bitter disillusionment to undo what had been done, and, when it came, the process was painful — if salutary.

It was now clear to everyone, not excepting the King himself, that the new reign might begin before the Princess should come of age in May 1837, and the question of a husband for her exercised various minds. William's candidate was already chosen: a son of that same Prince of Orange who, but for his own folly and the headstrong character of Princess Charlotte, might have been her husband and the father of the next British sovereign. It was an ironical choice, and not a prescient one. True, the House of Orange was allied by blood and friendship with the House of Hanover; but when the King sounded Melbourne about it, he was "much disappointed" to learn that from a political point of view his Prime Minister "did not think it would be a good thing". Less than a year later the young Queen told Melbourne that Uncle Leopold had been "amazingly frightened" when the Orange Princes came over. His Majesty of Belgium, quite apart from any pet plans of his own, viewed with reluctance the thought that a son of Charlotte's former fiancé might play his own former rôle with Charlotte's niece. The King, remarked Lord M., "was afraid Mamma had intentions", to which the Queen replied with conviction that "Mamma certainly had".

This attempt to *devancer* the Duchess came to nothing, partly owing to her superior tactics, partly owing to the sagacity of Melbourne himself. The Prince of Orange, disappointed but pertinacious, went direct to the Prime Minister to ask if he or the Government had any objection to such a connection. "Personally", answered Melbourne, "there could be no objection, no more than to any other Prince in Europe"; but he pointed out that the Prince's dominions were so situated that they would be constantly involved if war were to break out — surely an unanswerable objection.

In the meantime, in spite of choleric royal threats to prevent them from landing in England, Ernest of Saxe-Coburg had arrived with his two sons, the amusing, volatile Ernest, tainted with the hereditary disease of the House and already bidding fair to be quite as dissipated as his father, and the absolutely perfect Albert, whose perfection, physical and mental, seems at first slightly to have overwhelmed his young Cousin at Kensington.

Their coming was the signal for another outburst of anti-Coburg propaganda in the public press. Uncle Leopold was deeply pained — and a little peevish. He overflowed in sympathy to his niece. "Now", he wrote, "that slavery is even abolished in the British Colonies, I do not comprehend why you alone should be kept, a little white slavey in England, for the pleasure of the Court, who never bought you, as I am not aware of their having gone to any expense on that head, or of the King's having spent a sixpence for your existence."

It would indeed be annoying if the considerable sums of money spent by him in support of his widowed sister and her child, and the even more considerable sums which remained owing when he left England to receive the brand-new Belgian crown, should show no practical return. Is it possible that he misread the character of Albert as blindly as he did that of Victoria, and imagined that while the two young people remained lost in a rose-tinted dream he would govern England, with a little timely aid on the field from Stockmar? *There* was another person whom the King of the Belgians failed to size up correctly — Stockmar, who had not watched and agonized over Albert merely to see him become the decorous married gigolo of an infatuated young Queen.

By June 7 Victoria seemed to have made up her mind. We find her gushing about her great happiness, for which

the undivided credit was given to dear Uncle, and none at all to Mamma. Not until later did she acknowledge that Mamma as well as dear Uncle had " had intentions ". It is true that they pointed in the same direction, straight at Rosenau where the good-looking lamb was being quietly prepared for the sacrifice. Yet surely credit should have been given in both quarters. Albert was fairer-minded when the time came for him to show his personal views.

In August the Duchess and her daughter were at Claremont, preparing to spend the elder lady's birthday — August 17. It was perhaps in the circumstances unfortunate that Queen Adelaide's anniversary should have fallen on the 13th and King William's on the 21st. His own date falling on a Sunday, the King decided that the usual birthday dinner-party should take place on Monday the 22nd. And, in what must be recognized as a last desperate attempt to conciliate his sister-in-law, he invited her and the Princess to be present at the celebrations both on the 13th and the 22nd, and to spend the intervening days at Windsor.

The Duchess replied — according to Greville — without even mentioning the Queen. She desired, she said, to spend her birthday at Claremont; but she would go to Windsor on the 20th. It would have been wiser not to go at all. The slight to his wife infuriated the King to an extent which did him honour. But as on the 20th he had to go up to London to prorogue Parliament he was able to avoid being at the Castle when his sister-in-law arrived there, and by begging that dinner should not be put off till his return he may have hoped incidentally to escape some part at least of the civilities of welcome.

Some malignant fairy in flight over Westminster descended that day and whispered in the King's ear that he might spend an odd hour at Kensington Palace, and " look about it ". He went. And not unnaturally he directed his

steps to those apartments for which the Duchess had applied, and which he had refused to give her, having chosen to keep them for himself. Nobody had informed him, even after a lapse of eight months, that she had disregarded the ban, and had for that length of time been complacently established there. It was enough to give His Majesty a stroke, and it very nearly did.

On the return drive to Windsor the royal mind was occupied with the vision of the Duchess's grand piano, the Duchess's aviary, the Duchess's large collection of *Keepsakes* and *Annuals* and *bric-à-brac*, crowding up the seventeen separate apartments which he believed to have been left vacant in accordance with his commands.

Dinner was over when he reached the Castle, and the whole party had assembled in the drawing-room. The dangerous period seemed to have passed when his predilection for impromptu after-dinner oratory might have led to an awkward situation. Those who imagined this breathed freely too soon. The King walked straight up to the Princess, with the rolling, quarter-deck gait that he never lost, and, taking her by both hands, expressed his pleasure at seeing her there, and his regret that he did not see her more often. A low bow to the Duchess — and then "loudly, publicly, and in a tone of serious displeasure", he assailed her on the subject of the rooms at Kensington. "He neither understood", said he, "nor would endure, conduct so disrespectful to him." And the dismayed guests listened while the torrent of his wrath rolled on.

To the credit of his sister-in-law, she seems to have kept her temper, both on this occasion and on the following evening, when it was put to a test even more severe. Perhaps the two people most to be pitied were the Queen and Princess Victoria, who must surely have stolen anxious glances at each other, even if their eyes never met. It is

difficult to realize that less than a year later the subdued little Princess would be supreme, and the large, indignant lady, her mother, " quite, quite down ".

Sunday was a day of constraint. The thoughts beneath the King's grey quiff can have been as far from devout as those beneath the Duchess's plumed bonnet. This was the King's actual birthday, though the official celebrations were deferred till the morrow, and a hundred guests sat down to dinner in the evening. His Majesty sat between his sister-in-law and one of his sisters, with the Princess immediately opposite. And after his health had been drunk that happened which most of those present had felt would be no small calamity. He got on to his legs and made a speech, a long one.

The King's style in after-dinner oratory was wont to swing between the pompous and the colloquial, with grotesque effects in each kind ; but never had he produced anything like this " extraordinary and *foudroyant* tirade . . . this awful philippic ". So Greville called it, and as his informant was none other than Adolphus FitzClarence, who, like all his family and with more cause than some of them, detested the Duchess of Kent, the terms are probably not extreme. " I trust in God ", exclaimed the King in a loud, excited voice, " that my life may be spared nine months longer, after which period, in the event of my death, no Regency would take place. I should then have the satisfaction of leaving the royal authority to the personal exercise of that Young Lady (pointing to the Princess) the Heiress-Presumptive to the Crown, and not in the hands of a person now near me, who is surrounded by evil advisers and is herself incompetent to act with propriety in the station in which she would be placed."

At this point an interesting idea suggests itself. Is it possible that where dear Mamma and dear Uncle Leopold

had been blind, Uncle William had been granted clear vision?

There is nothing in his language which hints at any fear lest the next sovereign should be a mere puppet, and if any such fear had been felt it would at that moment most certainly have been uttered.

William went on to declare, with vehemence and not without reason, that he had been "grossly and continually insulted by that person", and that he was determined to endure no longer a course of behaviour so disrespectful to himself — resolved that it should not happen again — and that in future he would insist "that the Princess do upon all occasions appear at Court, as it is her duty to do".

The unfortunate Princess might well have felt inclined to say, with Prince Arthur, "I am not worth this coil that's made for me". She burst into tears at the peroration of which her future reign was the theme, and which was "full of paternal interest and affection".

While the Queen's distress was clearly shown in her face and reflected in the embarrassed faces of the whole company, the Duchess of Kent spoke no word, but immediately after His Majesty had ceased, she rose and retired, announced her intention of departing at once, and ordered her carriage.

The unexpected return to Kensington at that late hour, with the hasty summoning of grooms and harnessing of horses, and the unbarring of high gates at each end of the journey, would have been too peculiar an event to escape public attention, which nobody really wanted to focus upon the incident. Calmer counsels prevailed. An uneasy truce was patched up, and the indignant Duchess was persuaded to countermand the order and stay at Windsor till the following day.

So little compunction did the King feel for his lapse that he asked Adolphus quite jauntily the next morning what

people thought. His son replied with justice that though the Duchess merited the rebuke, it should not have been made before a hundred witnesses.

"By God," retorted His Majesty, "I do not care where I said it, or before whom."

CHAPTER IX

ANSWER TO A ROYAL PRAYER

When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat,
Yet fooled by hope men favour the deceit,
Trust on and think to-morrow will repay ;
To-morrow's falser than the former day.

DRYDEN

EVEN if the Duchess had been willing, or wise enough, to fall in with the King's views regarding the presence of the Princess at his Court, the decline in His Majesty's health and the frequent indispositions of the Queen would have made it difficult. After the painful scene at Windsor the position of the Heiress Presumptive was at once more interesting and — if possible — less easy. And it then seemed good to the Conroy clique to push forward their plans for an extension of the term fixed by the Regency Act of 1830. In nine months the Princess's eighteenth birthday would come, and without further legislation their hope of seeing the Duchess Regent at least until 1840 would depart. Conroy must sometimes have wished that like Joshua he could make the sun stand still — not for a day, but for a year or more.

According to Greville, the objects of the Duchess and her Comptroller were to get this extension approved by Parliament and to coerce the Princess into giving a written promise that she would make Conroy her Private Secretary. The foolish fellow went so far as to urge the Duchess to shut her daughter up and " keep her under duress till she

had extracted this engagement from her ". It is perhaps not without significance that at Christmas, 1836, Lehzen received a larger number of gifts from Her Royal Highness than upon any previous occasion — " a shawl, a dress, a pair of turquoise earrings, an annual and handkerchiefs ". Cleverly though the Baroness had veiled her opinions, it had been realized at last that she could do two things that were better left undone ; she could act as a channel of communication between her charge and the outside world, and she could stiffen her resistance.

It required no stiffening. With a firmness which must have surprised and may well have alarmed her Mamma, Victoria refused to make any promise of the colour desired.

Help was not far off. Uncle Leopold had visited England in September, and it was probably after some private conversation with his niece that he resolved to send over in the spring the most valuable auxiliary at his disposal — Stockmar. The Duchess was not too happy about things. Conroy had failed to create in her the solid hard core needed for the rôle she had to play, and when it came to applying *force majeure* her heart failed. Within an hour and a half of her brother's departure for Dover she sent a letter after him, to be delivered before he set sail. A later allusion in his correspondence with Victoria suggests that in this letter she withdrew her objection to the proposed visit of Stockmar, though it may have been concerned rather with their nephew Albert.

The English press celebrated the visit of His Belgic Majesty with one of those anti-Coburg campaigns from which newspaper readers seem to have derived so much pleasure. " I should like ", wrote Leopold plaintively, " to know what harm the Coburg family have done to England ! " One of them at least had got through very substantial sums of English money, and then left the country

in debt to the tune of £83,000, of which only a modest sum of £16,000 represented " liabilities which he had thought it incumbent upon him to take for his sister, the Duchess of Kent ".

Another cause of distress to the Duchess in the autumn of 1836 was the turn taken by events in Portugal, where her nephew, Prince Ferdinand, had been made Commander-in-Chief of the Army against the advice of the Duke of Terceira, and mutiny had broken out in the armed forces while civilian rebels, with that peculiar passion for dates characteristic of Continental malcontents, clamoured for the repeal of the Charter of 1826 and the restoration of the Constitution of 1824.

English politicians never had but one such complex, and Macaulay was probably the last seriously to ingeminate, " 1688 ".

The Duchess's anxiety was sharpened by letters from Dietz, the former Governor of her nephew, and Van de Weyer, the Belgian Minister in London, and relieved by others from Palmerston, then in the middle of his first term as Foreign Secretary. With his usual bluff optimism, Pam refused to be perturbed, and he added some praises of the young Prince which Ferdinand was to justify sixteen years later, when the death of Maria da Gloria left him Regent on behalf of their son Pedro.

It had been an agitating year, and many of its events had been such as to make the Duchess lean more heavily than ever upon the promptly-tendered arm of her Comptroller. In the course of a debate on the Orange Lodges, the powerful Tory organization of which Cumberland was Grand Master, it had been quite seriously suggested that on the King's death the members would rise and declare for the Duke against Princess Victoria. In vain he protested that he would shed the last drop of his blood in her defence.

The atmosphere of suspicion once created was difficult to dispel, and there can be little doubt that it had penetrated the petty court at Kensington.

1837 began badly. Political gossips were busy drawing their own conclusions from the hundred-and-one signs that between Kensington and Claremont on one side and Windsor and St. James's on the other there was now, if not open warfare, merely a frosty truce. "Your newspapers", wrote Princess Lieven to Earl Grey in April, "speak of a breach in the cordial relations between the Duchess of Kent and the Court" — but they had ceased to be cordial long before.

During the spring the Conroy clique redoubled their efforts, and Duncannon was "eternally closeted" with the Prime Minister, whom he sought to persuade of the expediency of the plan to extend the Duchess's term as Regent. In a cynical age a man like Melbourne can hardly be blamed if, looking a little way ahead, he permitted himself to wonder whether an *entente* with Conroy might not be an astute move. At this point the Duchess made a false one. Instead of confining negotiations to word of mouth, she wrote to Melbourne saying that she was authorized to tell him that it was her daughter's wish that a Bill should be introduced establishing a Regency "for a short time". The letter ought never to have been written; but, if at all, it should have reached the Prime Minister before King Leopold was able to write to his niece, "You have now the Baron at your elbow, and even your mother was most anxious for his arrival. *Speak sometimes with him.* It is necessary to accustom yourself to the thing."

The Duchess probably felt that Stockmar's presence would ease the tension resulting from the Princess's refusal to sign the promise concerning Conroy; she would have wished the Baron at Timbuktu if she had known that after Victoria *had* spoken with him he would go straight to

Melbourne and reveal the truth — that the demand for a Regency was "made at the instigation of Conroy and without the consent or knowledge of the Princess". It is to Melbourne's credit that he was "struck all of a heap" when he heard this.

Stockmar was able to report to the Princess that the Prime Minister at once promised that neither he nor anyone connected with him would have "anything more to say to Conroy". This severe blow to their hopes seems to have daunted the Kensington clique without reducing them to despair. One of their most powerful members had been temporarily removed from England in 1834, when Lord Durham was sent to Petersburg as Ambassador-Extraordinary, mainly in order to persuade the Tsar to join the Anglo-French *entente*, but also to overcome — if possible — His Imperial Majesty's objection to the appointment of Sir Stratford Canning in succession to Lord Heytesbury as British Ambassador at St. Petersburg. On this second point the Tsar remained adamant, and Palmerston suspected that Durham, instigated by Princess Lieven, had confirmed instead of combating imperial obstinacy. Melbourne might well feel some distrust of a clique one of whose most prominent members was so darkly regarded by his own Foreign Secretary. Both he and Pam must have been aware that Durham was keeping in close touch with the Duchess of Kent and Conroy and so — as he believed — "paving the way to future Court favour".

In the meantime the question of a consort for Victoria continued to excite all but those very few persons who knew that it was already a *chose jugée*. Early in May Lord John Russell, as Home Secretary, wrote to ask the Duchess whether it would be agreeable to her that Prince Adalbert of Prussia should be allowed to seek the hand of her daughter. Her reply, whether hers, or Conroy's, or their

oint production, is full of interest. "The undoubted confidence placed in me by the country," she wrote, "being the only parent since the Restoration who has had the uncontrolled power of bringing up the heir of the throne, imposes on me duties of no ordinary character." After this slightly irrelevant boast, she side-tracks the application by remarking that it ought to have been made to the King; then she doubles back again, and says that if she knows her duty to the King she also knows her "maternal ones", and will candidly tell his lordship that she was of opinion that the Princess should not marry till she was "much older". Dynastically one would have thought that the Princess, then within a fortnight of her eighteenth birthday, was of an age when marriage with a carefully-chosen Prince would be anything but unwise. Her mother had been a bride at seventeen, her grandmother, Queen Charlotte, at sixteen. She was not immature or under-developed, though the Salic clique affected to think her so. But an early alliance, even with a Coburger, was not to be desired. However biddable both the young people proved, it was always possible that matrimony and motherhood might stiffen that recently-revealed streak of self-will in Victoria. The idea probably was to wait till the term of the extended Regency should expire.

All that plotting and planning, hoping and fearing, for the sake of two poor years of mimic power — it is really strange.

The King's health was now failing fast, but he was reluctant that his niece should be kept in durance until released by his death. Uncle Leopold had got wind of His Majesty's intention to speak to the Princess "about the necessity of forming a separate establishment" when she reached her majority. "Your position," he wrote, "having a mother with whom you will naturally remain, would

render a *complete* independent establishment perhaps a matter of *real* inconvenience; still, something like that which Charlotte had will become desirable." And Charlotte's widower proceeded to outline his idea of an appropriate household, omitting an Equerry, as the Princess would not go out without her mother.

The event that was to render all these imaginary appointments vain was now hardly a month distant, though even the King's doctors could not give any indication of how much longer his sturdy old frame would resist the combined forces of asthma, bronchitis, and heart disease. Still bent upon circumventing his sister-in-law, he next wrote a personal letter to the Princess offering her an income of £10,000 a year, "*not* out of his Privy Purse", to be entirely at her own disposal and independent of her Mamma. This letter he entrusted to Lord Conyngham, with instructions to deliver it himself into the hands of the Princess.

The Lord Chamberlain had some difficulty in carrying out these orders. Conroy received him in his most Grand Vizierish manner, and asked by what authority he requested to see the Princess. "His Majesty's", replied Conyngham. The Grand Vizier withdrew, and after a short interval the King's messenger was ushered into the presence of the Duchess and her daughter.

It is easier to imagine the scene now than it can have been for Conyngham to guess what was passing in the mind of the young person who curtseyed to him — with the grace so laboriously imparted to her by Taglioni — as he announced himself to be the bearer of a letter from the King. Before she could receive it from his hand the Duchess thrust hers forward; but the Lord Chamberlain stood his ground. Not daring to go back to Windsor and admit to the excited invalid there that he had allowed the missive to be filched from him, he begged Her Royal Highness's

pardon " but he was expressly commanded by the King to deliver the letter into the Princess's own hands ". The Duchess had no choice but to draw back, and Conyngham, having performed his mission, bowed low and departed.

There could have been no question of refusing the King's offer. Money was scarce at Kensington, and the proviso that the Princess was to have full control of her £10,000 could soon be got round. She was born thrifty anyhow, and unlikely to launch out on to any wild adventures. On May 20 she recorded in her journal that she wrote " a letter to the King which Mamma had previously written for me ".

Uncle Leopold was kept in touch with all these manœuvres. " The whole of the paper concerning the King's proposition " was sent to Brussels, with a copy of the Princess's reply. " Who made the letter ? " he asked her. " Was it yourself, or came it from your mother ? " While approving of its tenour, he deprecated its insistence upon her " great youth and inexperience ". Whoever " made the letter ", the King understood that his offer had been accepted, and he wrote expressing his desire to name the person who should receive this money for the Princess, and at the same time proposing Sir Benjamin Charles Stephenson.

The choice might have been expected to please everyone. Sir Benjamin had entered the Hanoverian service in 1788, was Master of the Household at Windsor from 1812 to 1814, and superintendent of the Duke of York's household from 1823 till 1826; he was liked and trusted by the old Princesses, had been on good terms with Lord Liverpool, and as a Commissioner of Woods and Forests must have known both Lord Dover and Lord Duncannon well. But the Duchess of Kent, probably regretting her complaisance, or perhaps instigated by Conroy, soon began to make difficulties. £6000, she declared, ought to be allotted to herself,

and £4000 to her daughter. Very little time remained for negotiation, and what did remain was frittered away until it was too late. The King's prayer that he might live till his niece attained her legal majority had been heard in Heaven, and on earth his doctors had been able to obey his commands that they should " tinker him up " till after the anniversary of Waterloo.

With a candour at which our own democratic and indecorous days would stand appalled, the London and provincial newspapers were discussing the probable course of events after His Majesty's demise. The return from St. Petersburg of the " Duchess of Kent's *magnus Apollo* ", Lord Durham, was regarded as a sinister move in the game. In spite of his advanced opinions, the Radicalism of a man who spoke of £40,000 a year — derived from one of the worst industries in the country — as an income on which " one could just jog along " might well have been suspect, but it was his friendship with the King of the Belgians and his well-known alliance with the Conroy clique which excited the writers of leading articles in the early summer of 1837. What was he up to ? What would he do ? What would he get ? Nobody paused to ask what the new sovereign might choose to do or care to give.

The birthday came. Over Kensington Palace the gratified passers-by saw a large white flag floating and read the name of *Victoria* inscribed on it in letters of gold. A cynic might have recalled that this was the Duchess's name as well as her daughter's ; but it may be assumed that cynics were few in the quiet streets and lanes of Kensington that day. The church also had hoisted a flag — the Union Jack. The local taverns, the *Adam and Eve*, the *Holland Arms*, the *King's Arms*, the *Feathers*, the *Black Lion*, the *Hoop and Toy*, had all draped themselves in bunting, and were prepared to meet any calls which loyalty might make upon their vats

and cellars. Under the eye of the beadle, who wore his bravest cocked hat and braided coat, the Charity children, in their quaint Sabbath livery, were marched to church.

A public holiday had been proclaimed. Far from these half-rural scenes the child-workers in the mines and the mills enjoyed an interval of rest so unfamiliar that they hardly knew what to do with it. Their elders were little better versed in the technique of leisure. If contemporary accounts can be believed, a large part of the population divided its holiday hours between sauntering, staring, sleeping, and getting drunk.

All day a stream of royal and distinguished callers poured through the gates between the stone lion and unicorn guarding the carriage drive to the Palace. Public bodies, too, sent representatives, the obnoxious Catholic Association among them. The King and Queen were giving a ball the same evening, but nobody imagined that he would be in a fit state to attend, or she able to leave him. Princess Augusta, always so comfortable and kind, did the honours on behalf of both Their Majesties; and all that well-chalked floors, well-garnished tables, and well-illuminated chandeliers could do to make the occasion gay was undeniably done. But Henry Edward Fox (afterwards fourth Lord Holland), who was of the company, wrote that the Courts of Windsor and Kensington were "*au plus mal*", and that "tension was increasing".

The Duchess of Northumberland, Lady Conroy, Lady Flora Hastings, and Lehzen were in attendance upon the Duchess of Kent and her daughter that night, and many persons in the crowd which gathered to see them come would be able to name the four ladies for the benefit of the less well-informed. It almost seemed as if the nation — or a large part of it — were getting impatient. The good qualities and even better intentions of the dying King were

forgotten. Outside his immediate *entourage* few people knew with what selfless devotion he had done his duty as it was given to him to see it. Even the Tories would only regret him because his death left the way open — as they believed — for the Kent-Conroy-Durham-Duncannon gang. Among the great mass of his subjects few now spared a kindly thought to the old sailor with " his hair overflowing with powder and a seaman's gold-lace cock-and-pinch hat " whom they had cheered at the opera, or to the excited novice in the craft of kingship whom they had acclaimed only seven years before as he padded up St. James's Street in a large white beaver.

On May 30 the Lord Mayor, Aldermen, and Corporation of the City of London proceeded to Kensington to present an Address to the Duchess, who received them in the great saloon, with the Princess standing beside her. Such an opportunity for propaganda could not be allowed to pass, and it was seized with that lack of good taste and fine feeling which had unfortunately become characteristic of the discourses prepared for her. The situation of herself and the Princess after the death of the Duke of Kent was her mournful theme. Having been then abandoned or neglected by the Royal Family, she had thrown herself — she did not explain how — " upon the Country ". She had stood alone, almost friendless, in a strange land of which she could not even speak the language. Sympathetically the City Fathers listened, but not without effort, for she never lost the heavy foreign accent which had been remarked in her earlier utterances. Then she reminded them that she had done her best to bring up her daughter to be " the true Sovereign of the nation ", and to impress upon her that the protection of popular liberties and the preservation of the constitutional prerogatives of the Crown were " the proper aims of a Monarch ". This was a nasty one for

the Monarch who then lay dying at Windsor.

When the guttural voice had done, the deputation heard another and a very different one, of which the clearness, warmth, and sweetness recalled — of all voices in the world — Dorothy Jordan's. On such occasions as the present the Princess had hitherto merely curtseyed and smiled, but the City of London had something to say to its future Queen which could not suitably be compressed into the discourse presented to her mother. The address then read to her she described in her journal as " a very kind one " ; and she notes carefully that she answered in " the following words, from my own accord, ' I am very thankful for your kindness, and my Mother has expressed all my feelings ' ".

Her " own accord " — her first impromptu speech ; what must the feelings of the Duchess and Conroy have been, mild and modest and dutiful though it sounded ! The City Fathers would certainly not return to the Mansion House with the impression that Princess Victoria was an awkward or bashful young person. Two people would be well pleased — Lehzen and Stockmar : for Stockmar was still in England, " striving to do good and smooth all dissensions ". It was now too late for the Duchess by any abrupt change of tactics to undo the harm done during the past ten years ; but it was unfortunate from her point of view that there should have been such " dissensions " so near the critical moment. Only in one respect had she shown wisdom and foresight, and that was when on the Princess's birthday a year before she had given her nephew Albert a ring bearing the name ' Victoria '. He was still wearing it faithfully.

From Brussels a keen eye was bent upon London. Uncle Leopold was looking ahead, cheered by signs that his niece was winning popular favour, though he added a little churlishly, " Your immediate successor with the mustaches is

enough to frighten them into the most violent attachment for you". He is punctilious in sending "best regards" to Lehzen, and it is always possible that it was because he was writing by the same courier to Mamma that he omits to send *her* any messages. The presence of Stockmar in London was infinitely reassuring, for to the Baron had been allotted a task of great delicacy and moment. It was necessary that Conroy should be eliminated as soon as the new reign began; it was desirable that steps should be taken before the old reign ended. As a student of English history King Leopold probably realized how different the course of events would have been if Bolingbroke and the Jacobite peers had acted while the breath was still in Queen Anne's body; there must be no such fumbling now. Having secured the concurrence of Melbourne, Stockmar quietly got into touch with Lord Liverpool. This was not the "Arch Mediocrity" but his son, the third Earl, who could remember Princess Victoria occupying a small bedroom without a fireplace when she and Mamma visited his father at Buxted. The time was now near when that insignificant and occluded figure would move to the centre of the stage, and it must stand there alone.

Though it is usually stated that until her accession Victoria never received anyone by herself, her own notes on June 15, five days before the King's death, show that on that date she had "a highly important conversation" *tête-à-tête* with Liverpool, who also spoke with the Duchess and Conroy. On July 5 his lordship wrote to Stockmar to report that he had been to Apsley House and had told the Duke of Wellington "the whole of his communication with the Queen, the Duchess of Kent, and Sir John Conroy on 15th June", also of his subsequent communication with Lord Melbourne, "all of which he very much approved of". Between those two dates many things had happened

— to be related in their proper sequence — and Conroy's fall was an accomplished fact.

After those "highly important conversations" the Princess was lulled to sleep only five times more by the loud ticking of Papa's repeater in its tortoiseshell case; only five times more did the Duchess see the fair hair escaping from under the quilled nightcap on the pillow alongside her own. It is clear, by the way, that the Princess wore her hair loose and not braided while she slept, for though she removed her nightcap before going in to receive Lord Conyngham and the Archbishop of Canterbury in the pale morning light of June 20, she cannot have paused to have her hair unbraided, and she was not vain enough to have striven after effect. It was decorum, and not any aspirations after the picturesque, which dictated the removal of the nightcap, and that it *was* removed is clear from the picture painted under her own supervision long after.

The story of that June morning has been often retold, and it is in itself so romantic that even Disraeli could not make it absurd. But he and all the other writers who have transported themselves in imagination to that "Palace in a garden" on that memorable day have naturally fixed their eyes upon the young Queen. There is another possible angle of vision, hardly less pregnant.

Every night that week the Duchess of Kent must have retired to bed with the knowledge that before the sun rose again the hour she had longed for might strike. Conroy, too, can have had no other thought. Neither was ignorant that steps were on foot to frustrate the plans they had so hopefully laid, but it seems that up to the last moment they refused to be daunted. When the royal carriage had clattered over the irregular flagstones of the Palace courtyard, much hammering and shouting was needed to wake the sleepy servants within. The Duchess's — consequently

the Princess's — bedroom being on the north-east or garden side, they heard nothing. But presently muted footsteps shuffled along the corridors, and a respectful hand tapped at a white-panelled door. The Princess slept on; but her mother woke, and for the last time exercised her authority in a futile effort to delay even by an hour or two the moment when her word would no longer regulate every action of her child. Lord Conyngham and Archbishop of Canterbury? Let them be told that the Princess was in a sweet sleep and could not be disturbed. They would go away — if only to come again later. Or, at the worst, they would wait. Had not Sir John cultivated the good-will of Conyngham's Mamma? It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the Duchess was striving to gain time for a hasty interview with her Comptroller. Long-expected events are apt to take people unawares when at last they come.

But the messenger returned with the news that Lord Conyngham must speak with *the Queen* upon affairs of state. There could be no more delay. The Duchess bent over the white-coifed head still peacefully inert on the pillow. It was six o'clock in the morning, an hour when the slumbers of the healthy and innocent are deep.

As consciousness broke through, Victoria understood what Mamma was saying to her. The Archbishop — Lord Conyngham — they were there — at the Palace — they wished to see her. But even then the Duchess either did not choose or could not bring herself to speak the words "You are now Queen". She watched the childish figure rise, remove its cap so that the not very abundant fair hair fell over the rather narrow shoulders; she saw a dressing-gown [1] flung over the nightgown and slippers placed on the small bare feet. Then she saw something surely to be

[1] Victoria herself calls it a 'dressing gown', but it seems to have been a sleeveless wrap more like a shawl.

remembered with a queer sense of wonder and pain — Victoria's back as she quitted the room, moving steadily, slowly, into her own little sitting-room where the Archbishop and the Lord Chamberlain fell on their knees before her. The door closed. Mamma was left outside.

It is significant that in her careful record of the events of her accession day the Queen should have made no mention at all of her mother until very near its close. Many things are noted ; the talk with Stockmar over the breakfast-table ; the letters promptly written to Queen Adelaide, to Uncle Leopold, to " dear good Feodore " ; the audience with Melbourne, " whom I saw in my room and *quite alone*"; the swearing-in of the Privy Council ; the reading of the declaration to the Council ; the embraces of the quaintly-contrasted uncles ; the audiences granted to ministers, prelates, Court officials ; all these are described with some detail. It is true that there was no place for even the most honoured and best-loved of Mammas in any of these scenes, nor for any other woman. This girl who, it had been suggested, was too timid to take up the burden of sovereignty yet awhile, bore herself with perfect composure alone among a lot of large, alarming, slightly flustered men. Perhaps it was as well that the Duchess was not there, or even Lehzen with her anxious eyes.

The day must have seemed interminable to the poor Duchess, cut off from any participation in its historic events. But might not the evening make amends ? Would not Victoria seek her mother's society then ? In four words the Diary gives the answer : " Took dinner upstairs alone ". Only at the very end we read, " Went down and said Good-night to Mamma, etc " ; and after that, as if by an irresistible transition, " My *dear* Lehzen will *always* remain with me as my friend, but will take no situation about me, and I think she is right ". ' Etc ' may be interpreted as meaning

Mamma's usual *entourage* — "Sir J. C.", Lady Flora, and the rest. "I have," wrote the Queen to King Leopold a fortnight later, "alas! seen so much of bad hearts and dishonest and *double* minds that I know how to value and appreciate *real worth*." Such worth she had long perceived in Stockmar and Lehzen, and now gratefully recognized in Lord Melbourne, whose attitude over Conroy's Regency plot must have been known to her for some time. To those three loyal if rather oddly-assorted friends her debt during those hazardous first days was very great. They helped her to get rid of Conroy; they helped her to give, as finally and as inconspicuously as possible, that *quietus* to the Duchess which had to be given if all the dreary mischief were not to begin all over again.

The person towards whom the Queen's heart turned at this time was not her mother but her widowed aunt, to whom, with a grace which sat well upon her, she continued at first to address letters not as *The Queen Dowager* but as *The Queen*. Adelaide was to have her reward now, and it was made complete later by a full reconciliation between herself and her sister-in-law. With characteristic magnanimity she wrote in reply to Victoria's offer to come and see her after William's death, "If Monday will suit you I shall be ready to receive you and your dear mother on that day". Perhaps she realized both the nature and the severity of the ordeal through which the Duchess was about to pass.

Charles of Leiningen, with his wife and their young children, was in England, and while he attended the King's complicated and chaotic funeral at Windsor, they lunched with the new Queen, her Mamma and Lehzen, to the solemn thudding of the minute guns. Both the Duchess and the Queen were very kind to Mary Leiningen, who stood with her mother-in-law on the steps of the throne at St. James's Palace on July 12 while Victoria, seated and wearing the

mantle and insignia of the Order of the Bath, conferred the same Order on Prince Esterházy, received addresses from the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London, and the Court of Common Council, and read answers to them. The City Fathers could hardly fail to remember vividly that day some six weeks earlier when they had gone to Kensington on a similar errand, and the limelight had been focused on the comely, ample, dark-eyed figure now standing silent, one step below the throne, " much affected when her maternal care was extolled ".

In the interval wagging tongues had asked what would happen to Conroy, and what Durham was to get — " he should ", conceded Greville, " have something ". Actually, Lord Durham had to wait another year for his reward, the Governor-Generalship of the turbulent colony of Canada, which he held for only a few uneasy months before returning unbidden to England, broken in health, bitter in spirit, and a disappointed man for the brief years of life which then remained to him. The question of Conroy's fate was settled more expeditiously.

Six days after her accession — on Monday, June 26 — the Queen wrote :

> At about 10 minutes past four came Lord Melbourne, and stayed till ½ past 4. I talked with him as usual on Political affairs, about my Household, and various other *Confidential* affairs.

The same day Melbourne wrote to Conroy the following letter, preserved among the Conroy MSS. at Balliol :

SOUTH ST, *June* 26, 1837

MY DEAR SIR JOHN,

I beg leave to acquaint you that if I should continue to be Her Majesty's adviser it is my intention when the state of the Irish peerage shall authorize a new creation to advise her Majesty to confer upon you the dignity of a Peer of that part of her Majesty's dominions, and I beg leave to add that this promise

is made with the knowledge, assent, and approbation of her Majesty.

I remain,
My dear Sir John,
Your faithful and obedient servant,
MELBOURNE

By the Act of Union a new Irish peerage could be created only after the extinction or absorption of four old ones, and between 1836 and 1848 the only creations were the Oranmore and Bellew baronies. As Melbourne ceased to be Her Majesty's adviser in 1841 he can hardly be accused of bad faith, and it should be noted that the peerage was to be conferred on Conroy only if the Prime Minister should continue in office until its bestowal became possible. Yet the Queen's failure to implement the promise made on her behalf by Melbourne rankled in the minds of Conroy's children, and whoever wrote the inscription for his monument at Arborfield thought fit to place it on record that Princess Victoria on her accession to the throne " created him a Baronet with a promise under the hand of her Prime Minister to create him a peer of Ireland as soon as the state of that kingdom should permit a Creation ". This tautological statement shifts the responsibility from Melbourne to the Queen, which, as the letter quoted above will show, was hardly fair.

According to Greville, Victoria sent for Sir John and desired him to name the reward he expected for his services to her parents. " He asked for the red ribband, an Irish peerage, and a pension of £3000 a year." To this Her Majesty replied that the first two rested with her ministers and " she could not engage for them ", but that the pension he should have. Conroy himself told his friends that the Queen had sent for him, informed him that she knew her father, if he had lived, would have provided for him, that

she stood in his place and would do what he would have done; that her first act would be to make him a baronet and she would give him a pension of £3000 a year, and "from that moment she had taken no sort of notice of him". So it was the Red Hand and not the red ribband with which his services to her parents were rewarded.

Nothing can have brought more forcibly home to the Duchess the absolute wreck of all her dreams than the firm, swift, and almost casual manner in which the Queen dealt with Sir John Conroy. Where now were his grandiose schemes, of which herself had always sat at the centre and on the summit, like Britannia on a circus car? Where were those perils with which he had frightened her on Victoria's behalf? All vanished: the new sovereign unanimously acclaimed: the Duke of Cumberland behaving with perfect decorum pending his departure for Hanover; and the daughter who was to have clung to her hand clinging rather to Queen Adelaide's.

Not until two years later did the flamboyant figure of Conroy disappear finally from the Duchess's *entourage*, but from the moment that the Court moved to Buckingham Palace not only he but his wife and Victoire were banished from the presence of the Queen.

Princess Lieven was in London, and by craning her long neck from side to side she was able to catch various glimpses of what was going on. "*La Duchesse de Kent*", she wrote to Lord Aberdeen on July 30, 1837, "*est parfaitement mécontente — elle m'en a même parlé*", — which was indiscreet of her, to say the least of it. The Princess doubted whether mother and daughter would remain long beneath the same roof; she marked the absence of the Conroys from the Palace circle; she perceived that Lord Melbourne was the object of Her Royal Highness's detestation. At the very moment that King Leopold was warning his niece

against the ex-Ambassadress, his sister was confiding to her, "*Il n'y a pas d'avenir pour moi. Je ne suis plus rien*".

It must be recorded to the Duchess of Kent's credit that in the main she accepted her defeat with dignity and without rancour. When Lady Augusta Stanley, at Queen Victoria's request, made extracts from the Diary in which the Duchess had recorded "dry daily facts and a few purely personal remarks", she traced by inference "the touching inward and outward struggle thro' which that devoted, sensitive, maternal heart regained the peace, and joy and confidence which had been destroyed by the timidity which had allowed third persons to come between mother and child" — apparently an oblique allusion to the parts played by Lehzen and Conroy, the "two people" [1] who, according to the Queen, had estranged them, Lord Broughton, who did not consider there was another man in the country who could have extricated Her Majesty as well as Melbourne did "from the difficulties in which the indiscretions of others had involved her", was able to note before long that the Duchess was bearing Sir John Conroy's exclusion from Court "with due resignation". Things were made easier for her by her daughter's "irreproachable" manner towards her. Creevey, not being able to peep at *le dessous des cartes*, exclaimed that he never saw anything more pretty or natural than the devotion which the young Queen showed to her mother "in everything".

On the Duchess's birthday there was a dinner, followed by a concert at which Grisi, Albertazzi, and Lablache performed, and the Duke of Sussex, Lord Melbourne, and Lord Palmerston were present. The anniversary thus musically celebrated was only her fifty-first, but in reply to congratula-

[1] When Queen Victoria wrote in 1861 "for a time *two people* most wickedly estranged us", she can hardly have been thinking of any *other* two. Therefore it must have been the Duchess who was timid.

tions she said rather sadly, " Ah, I am too old for many happy returns ". Surely it was the happiness rather than the number that then seemed in doubt !

Uncle Leopold and his amiable if inhibited young wife arrived in England on August 29 on a three-weeks visit, and Windsor took on an air of cheerfulness which was certainly not a reflection of His Majesty's personality. " Old Fozzy " had been summoned, and accompanied the Queen and the Duchess on their daily rides in the Great Park, Lehzen following sometimes in a pony-chaise. Melbourne and Palmerston were not infrequently of the party clustering round that " gay little Whig ", that " resolute little tit ", Victoria R. Those who had been either involved in the Regency plot or aware of it must now have realized with mixed feelings its utter futility. When Lady Sefton remarked what a credit it was to the Duchess of Kent to have made the Queen " what she was ", Palmerston rejoined that the Duchess had " every kind of merit " but that the Queen had an understanding of her own that could have been made by no one.

During that golden summer Mamma seems to have been anxious to keep pace and contact with her daughter before the world, even if in private she saw little of her and always had to ask leave — not always granted — before entering her presence. But they went out riding together, in their trailing black habits and low-crowned top-hats ; they attended exhibitions and theatrical performances, and it was observed with sentimental satisfaction that to Her Majesty the Duchess was still ' Mamma '. Why not ? Only the keenest eye could discern behind one smiling mask a faint hostility and behind the other humiliation and pain.

Self-deception is a very usual and not altogether an unamiable defect, and Victoria possessed it in a high degree. After time, and the influence of the Prince Consort and the

resurgence of the real character of her mother had broken almost every barrier between them, the Queen wrote, " she was the gentlest, most tender and loving creature that one can ever imagine . . . her heart like none other was always full of loving kindness for outside people ". With astonishing rapidity this woman who only yesterday had been crudely arrogant and ostentatious sloughed her acquired attributes and reverted to what she had been. That it was a reversion and not a change can hardly be doubted. Once Conroy's influence was withdrawn, there is no hint of any ambitious striving, any desire to rule or shine, nor, after that impulsive outburst to Princess Lieven, is there any trace of articulate resentment at her sudden and complete occlusion. Whatever dreams she may have fostered of participating behind the scenes in some of those pageants in which there was for herself no speaking and often no walking part, she acquiesced with dignity when the Queen chose to rehearse her speeches not to her but to Lehzen and, in the short intervals of privacy and leisure which her royal duties permitted, sought Lehzen's sole society rather than her Mamma's.

Before this happy state of affairs was well established there remained two points to be settled — the Duchess's financial position and her status. The Cabinet had these matters under consideration on November 14, when it was proposed that Her Royal Highness should receive a pension of £30,000 a year, the Government to pay her debts — which were considerable. When it was recalled that George III's widowed mother, as Princess of Wales, had had £60,000, Lord John Russell interjected, " God knows how many dowagers *we* may have ! " A week later Lord Melbourne read to the Cabinet a letter from the Duchess turning down the proposal that Parliament should pay her debts, saying little or nothing about the £30,000, and suggesting

that she should be given the precedence and rank of a Queen Mother, as no one since the time of Henry VII had been in her situation. It is perhaps not too fanciful to detect the hand of Conroy in this combination of haughtiness and history; if his hand it was, this must have been the last occasion when it was allowed to intervene.

One person at least did not realize how things were changed. This was Brougham, who, intervening in the debate on the proposed pension, referred to the Duchess as the "Queen Mother" and declared that a plain man like himself, having no motive but to do his duty, might be permitted to surmise that any additional provision for her might possibly come from the Civil List, which Parliament "had so lavishly voted". This was interpreted as a hint that the Duchess was still a power behind the scenes; but Melbourne knew better; Parliament hoped otherwise; and the pension was duly voted. Later when Her Majesty was informed that differences had arisen in the Cabinet as to the best mode of paying her mother's debts, she retorted with spirit, "I hope there is no difference of opinion as to whether I am to pay them or not". In the event an arrangement was made by which Her Royal Highness contributed out of her income towards their payment.

The question of the Duchess's status was a little delicate. Brougham had obviously heard of her desire to be given the rank of Queen Mother, but Melbourne was able to inform his ministers in private that it was not the Queen's wish to give her mother a rank which would put her above her aunts. "It would", remarked Victoria shrewdly, "do the Duchess no good, and would offend the aunts." She was particularly fond of Aunt Augusta and Aunt Mary, and charmingly attentive to them both; but it was difficult to feel the same to Aunt Sophia, half blind and wholly pathetic though she might be, for Conroy frequented the house in

Kensington to which she had moved from the Palace, the quiet little house where Mamma sometimes met him, perhaps not by chance.

After the fall of Conroy the Duchess's physical vitality seems to have ebbed almost suddenly. She aged overnight — the night of June 19-20. Up to the eve of the accession one still receives the impression of a vivid, vigorous personality, equal to any fatigue and rather welcoming exertion. Yet when Mr. Creevey was at Brighton in October 1837, he found himself playing whist with an " agreeable and chatty " elderly lady well pleased with " a little running fire from a wag ", yet strangely inclined to somnolence. This inclination might suggest the onset of a deficiency disease did we not know that it was a Coburg trait — her nephew, the Prince Consort, at the age of twenty-one, used to begin to " nod on the sofa " as early as 10.30 P.M. Incidentally, the fact that she and he possessed this habit in common is a further piece of evidence — if any be needed — that Albert was the son of her brother Ernest, and not the child of an adulterous liaison between the wayward Luise of Saxe-Coburg and some lover, ' Nordic ' or otherwise.

According to Creevey the Duchess when at Brighton was " supposed to play cards to keep herself awake ", which sounds as if the necessity were already recognized ; but this is the first allusion to it. The contrast between the rather boisterous gaiety of the atmosphere at Kensington, with Sir John bandying quips with Lady Flora, and those " dullest possible " evenings at the Pavilion, where the *entourage* sat round in wooden boredom, may have confirmed this tendency. Whatever the cause, it persisted. In May 1841, when the Duchess visited King Leopold at Laeken, her brother wrote that she was " less sleepy than in England " ; and in her last years at Frogmore, Frederick Locker-Lampson recorded that " she would play a card and take a

transitory nap", when the company were quite happy to "wait till she woke and picked up the trick, which she did with dignity and very deftly".

Creevey described Her Royal Highness with some acerbity as "a horrible player", but on one occasion at least Lord John Russell seems to have suffered even more than he. This was in December 1837, when Lord Broughton partnered Her Royal Highness against Lord John and Lord Byron — a very different Byron from the one whom Broughton, as John Cam Hobhouse, had once known and loved so well.

Sir Frederick Stovin played the Duchess's hand "as she seemed confused" — perhaps a euphemism for drowsy? — and she and her partner won the trick. Then Lord John and Broughton played against her and Byron. The Duchess became faint, but after one of her ladies had handed her some smelling-salts she recovered sufficiently to continue the game and win the rubber. Lord John had to pay her eight shillings, and he handed her a sovereign in exchange for which she gave him nine shillings, saying graciously that she thought "that was right". The Home Secretary smiled and "took his change; but", adds Broughton, "did not seem pleased with this specimen of royal arithmetic".

Ten days later the Duchess forwarded to Lord John a memorandum in manuscript covering forty-two pages and giving "an account of the family, upbringing, resources and events in the Duchess of Kent's and Queen Victoria's life". This had been drawn up and given to her — she does not say by whom — "with many kind constructions which she wished to deserve", but it is not clear why she should have fixed upon the Home Secretary. Her mind might have been expected to turn rather to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for on that day — December 12 — Parliament voted her an additional £8000 a year, Charles

Watkyn Williams Wynn, George Grote, and Joseph Hume dissenting.

It is with some surprise that one finds two such stalwart Radicals as Grote and Hume in this trio. The historian of Greece was a progressive philosopher of the school to which the Duke of Kent had looked for support, seldom in vain, and Hume, besides being a Benthamite, had been foremost in denouncing the alleged schemes of the Orange Lodges to make Cumberland King. But Kent was no longer alive to show how well his own advanced views would stand up to the strain of kingship. Cumberland had ceased to be a menace, and the financial plight of the widow of the People's Friend left at least these two of his former admirers unmoved.

So at the end of 1837, after the event which was to have brought her power and splendour, we see the Duchess of Kent, humiliated and thrust aside, her once dominant figure nodding over a card-table while, like a middle-aged Ferdinand and a daughterly Miranda, the Queen and Melbourne sit at a chessboard in the centre of the island stage.

CHAPTER X

TOTAL ECLIPSE

I wol biwaille, in manner of tragédie,
The harm of them that stoode in heigh degree.
CHAUCER, *Monk's Tale*

IT is with some surprise that we find among the number of Conroy's friends no less a person than the Duke of Wellington. His Grace had not hesitated to put a scandalous interpretation upon the Duchess's relations with her Comptroller, but having formed his ideas before "this damned morality" — as Melbourne called it — began to spread upwards, he refused to be shocked; nor did he allow himself to be prejudiced against the Duchess by her intransigent behaviour over the Regency Bill in 1830. One detects a note of compassion in his deep, staccato voice when one overhears him saying to Greville in July 1838 that Conroy had told him "that the Queen was entirely under the influence of Stockmar and Madame de Lehzen", and that the Duchess of Kent had none whatever. "He saw her every day, her health and spirits broken" — yet not so broken that she did not endeavour sometimes to talk to the Queen about him, upon which Her Majesty invariably, and with great firmness, "desired that the subject might not be mentioned".

"How is it possible", Victoria asked Melbourne, "that I can have any confidence in my mother, when I know that whatever I say to her is repeated immediately afterwards to that man?"



THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON RIDING IN THE PARK
From a contemporary print
Rischgitz Studios

The Duchess might well have felt some hesitation in opening her heart when, on her side, she knew that whatever she said to the Queen would be repeated to " that woman ". But it was tactless and undignified of Conroy to haunt the Court, for he had no hope or prospect of being received by the Queen. Efforts were made to prevail upon him to go abroad ; regrets were entertained that it had not been made part of the bargain that he should do so. His eldest son was attaché to a special mission to Brussels at the time, and an excuse might well have been found in that quarter, unless King Leopold objected.

King Leopold's hands were at the moment pretty full, and his dispute with his neighbour, the King of Holland, over the question of the forts at Antwerp left him little leisure to sympathize with his sister, even though he was always able to find time to direct a powerful stream of propaganda upon his niece. He was soon to learn with surprise and pain that the Queen had no intention of becoming the instrument of his violent anti-Dutch policy, and that she not only grasped but approved the objections to it which her ministers laid before her.

All these things, the banishment of the Conroys, the affectionate relations between the Queen and her Prime Minister, the quiet pervasion of Her Majesty's private life by Lehzen, the precarious situation of King Leopold's brand-new kingdom, augmented the distress of the Duchess, and both she and her brother observed with alarm the increasingly aloof attitude of the Queen towards marriage in general and her cousin Albert in particular. Less than a year had passed since Mamma herself had informed Lord John Russell that in her opinion Princess Victoria " should not marry till she was much older " ; but the Princess was now the sovereign of a great country, revelling in her freedom, her power, and her success. She was no longer a faint aquarelle

sketch of a gentle maiden ; she was a glowing picture of a high-spirited and warm-blooded young woman, and a Hanoverian at that. It could not be said that she was kicking over the traces ; but she showed a tendency to frisk. And ill-natured observers thought that she was finding in the society of Lord Alfred Paget a too-agreeable alternative to that of " dear Lord M."

Albert's behaviour had been most correct, if slightly tepid. During his summer vacation from the University of Bonn in 1837 he had made a tour of Switzerland and Northern Italy with his brother. He had sent Victoria an album of views, showing most of the places visited ; he had done better — he had gathered a *rose des Alpes* for her on the top of the Rigi, and at Ferney had obtained for her collection of autographs a fragment in the handwriting of Voltaire. But it was now Victoria's turn to think that she was " too young ". We have her own word for it that " in after years she often regretted this decision on her part ". Nobody had greater cause to regret it than the Duchess of Kent, who would cordially have endorsed her daughter's further comment, " had she been engaged to the Prince a year sooner than she was, and had she married him at least six months earlier, she would have escaped many trials and troubles of different kinds ".

One trial (and trouble) which she might thus have avoided was the deplorable episode of Lady Flora Hastings.

All through Coronation year — 1838 — Lady Flora remained in attendance on the Duchess, and she and Conroy kept up that running fire of light talk, not in the best of taste, for which both of them were to pay so dearly. Lehzen was no longer there to hear them laughing at her love of caraway seeds and *sauerkraut*, but it is certain that her absence did not impair her value as a source of merriment ; and it would seem that another pleasantry was concerned

with a supposed sentimental episode between the Lady-in-Waiting and the Comptroller. No doubt the Duchess ought gently to have discouraged this loose tone; but nobody knew better than she that it meant nothing. Though herself neither coarse-tongued nor ill-natured, she belonged to the period of the French Revolution and the Regency, and could hardly be expected to anticipate by prophetic divination the more austere code imposed upon English social life by her own nephew. Her first husband had been a Frenchified rake; her second, though a pompous bore, was still one of that raffish group of Royal Dukes among whom only the youngest was a credit to their virtuous parents; her Comptroller, the man whose views and habits had most effect upon her own after the Duke of Kent's death, was a racy Irishman of the breed well liked at Carlton House. She cannot be very severely blamed if during those hours when the Queen did not seek or command her company she should have allowed Sir John and Lady Flora to rail and rattle unreproved. They both belonged to that recent past that must now have seemed more remote than the old days at Amorbach. She was sure of their affection for herself; and in justice to Conroy it must be remembered that his 'haunting' of the Palace cannot have been due to any wild hope of finding himself received with pleasure there by anyone but the forsaken Duchess. Nothing was to be gained now by fidelity to the Queen's mother; but he, and Lady Flora, and a few other stalwarts were faithful.

The first six months of 1838 were mainly a prelude to the splendours of the Coronation, and from those rather shabby splendours the Duchess of Kent could not be debarred. But during this year and the next very odd and unexpected things were happening, especially in the newspaper world. Those Tory papers which had formerly backed the Cumberland clique through thick and thin began to change their

tactics, and to inveigh against the foreign *camarilla*, Leopold, Lehzen, and Stockmar, who were alienating the Queen from her beloved and respected mother in order to serve their own interests. The Duchess must have smiled rather sadly if extracts from these perfervid articles were brought to her attention. Distrust of the King of the Belgians was no new feature; suspicions of Baroness Lehzen had been hinted, if not loudly voiced, before; but now appears a growing uneasiness concerning Prince Albert, known to be their candidate for the Queen's hand and believed to be tainted with Popery.

These unexpected champions of the Duchess of Kent did not pause to ask themselves whether she also desired the Coburg match. They might have been surprised to learn that nobody desired it more than herself, or with better reason. Improbable though it is that she had had a frank, confidential talk with Albert in 1836, it really looks as though she understood his character better than his uncle did, and she assuredly would not have supported him if she had thought that Lehzen would still rule the roost after his marriage to Victoria. Another possibility is that Stockmar had taken the measure of the Baroness, and had realized that the once-useful tool would have to be laid aside — gently if possible — when his nonpareil Prince was installed at Windsor. Together the Baron and the Prince went on an instructive tour of Italy in the autumn of 1838. *Il ne faut pas brusquer les choses* was evidently Stockmar's motto at this time.

In spite of her drowsy tendency the Duchess of Kent was not an idle woman. She kept up a voluminous correspondence with the far-flung Coburg clan; she read books, usually instructive books, and gave verbal summaries of them to her daughter when conversation flagged or took a thorny turn; she was still interested in *chiffons*, and obtained

information about the latest fashions in Brussels and Paris through the kind offices of Belgian and French diplomats. With three, at least, of her 'in-laws' she was now on good terms. The breach between herself and the Queen Dowager must have been closing when she and Victoria sang duets for Adelaide's entertainment during the first visit paid to Windsor by King William's widow after his death; with the Duke of Sussex, her neighbour while she remained at Kensington and her friend afterwards, she had more than one taste in common — progressive views, serious reading, and pet birds; with Princess Sophia her relations remained more affectionate than the Queen might have wished.

None the less her life must have seemed oddly empty when neither by night nor by day was the figure of her daughter constantly at her side. The distractions, frivolous and otherwise, of Coronation year would be doubly welcome, and there could not come such another opportunity to put on the gayest of plumage. Sometimes there were comforting reminders that she was not disregarded abroad, whatever might be her portion at home. The Sultan's envoy to the Coronation not only brought for the Queen a gorgeous diamond necklace but for her mother a diamond bracelet valued at £4000. It was presumably not within the hearing of either royal lady that His Excellency, contemplating the preparations for the ceremony, ejaculated, "All this for a woman!"

Yet even so the Coronation compared unfavourably with that of George IV, which had combined the tinsel glories of a pantomime with the brassy splendours of a circus procession. No herbwomen strewed blossoms before Victoria; no Hereditary Champion flung down a glove for her; there was no banquet in Westminster Hall at which her faithful lieges could pledge her in large, heavily-gilded

loving-cups. In the Abbey itself there was more red twill than red velvet. Wellington, rather to his own annoyance, received louder plaudits than anyone except the self-possessed, serious little Queen, and Princess Lieven wrote rather scornfully to Lord Aberdeen of " the feeble attempt to treat Lord Melbourne with the same honours ".

The Duchess enjoyed whatever comfort and support the presence of her brother Ernest, her son Charles, and her daughter Feodore could give her, but she was much overwhelmed when the crown was placed upon Victoria's head, " the guns went off, the trumpets began, and the shouts ". The Queen sat immovable, except for the glance which she turned — not to the royal box where Mamma sat, but to the box immediately above. " It was ", she wrote the same evening, " my dearly-beloved, angelic Lehzen whose eyes I caught when on the Throne, and we exchanged smiles." The Duchess did not smile. She wept so immoderately that her Lady-in-Waiting had to place the coronet on her head at the appropriate moment.

When Victoria returned to the first robing-room she found Mamma there, with the Duchesses of Gloucester and Cambridge. Writing her journal of that eventful day she *did* remember and mention that circumstance, but without comment. What did it matter if her mother were red or pale, smiling or crying, excited or calm? " Dear Lord M.'s " eyes had filled with tears as he did homage; and angelic Lehzen had smiled. Those were the things that mattered to the little Queen upon whose smooth fair hair the oil of gladness was as yet hardly dry.

But for that unlucky sea-mist at Sidmouth nineteen years before it might well have been upon the Duchess's dark hair that the oil would have been poured and the crown set; not, it is true, the anointing and the crowning appointed for a Queen Regnant, but the English rite is gratifying to the

Queen Consort. "Receive the Crown of Honour, and Glory, and Joy" — she had heard those words spoken to Queen Adelaide at the Coronation of King William, and she must have realized that they would have been spoken to her also if the Duke of Kent had lived. That would have been a very different Coronation, with a very different central figure. No wonder that his widow wept.

She recovered herself sufficiently to go with Feodore after dark and see the illuminations, but she did not hurry back to the Palace, and made only a brief appearance in the room where the Queen sat talking cheerfully to various people, with Lord Melbourne sitting near. By a few moments she came too late to hear the Prime Minister tenderly commending the conduct of his sovereign during the ceremonies of the day.

The transparencies were very fine. Some of them had been used at the rejoicings over the passage of the Reform Bill, and bore such legends as *Freedom and Prosperity*, *No Tyranny*, and *Let the People Prevail.* Neither George IV nor William IV would have relished this manner of saluting their advent to the throne, but Victoria had been bred in the advanced Whig creed, and would see nothing incongruous in it. Besides, the vast majority of the designs were new and obsequious, and her own more or less recognizable profile, so reminiscent of George III's, appeared on all sides, with or without laurels, cornucopias, lions and unicorns, and large exulting figures of Britannia. It must have been a strange experience for the Duchess and Feodore to contemplate all this symbolism, all these twinkling lights and streaming flambeaux, and to reflect that only a short while before the object of it all had been the Little Vicky whom they had so imperfectly understood.

Mamma went to bed early that night, but the Queen remained up, enjoying quite artlessly the knowledge that

on the most memorable day in her life she had acquitted herself well.

The years 1838–39 were troublesome enough at home and abroad to make a might-have-been Regent thankful to be a mere onlooker. The rebellion in Canada was appeased neither by the arrival nor the departure of Lord Durham, and continued till 1839, in which year the first Opium War with China broke out; nearer home Chartism had sprung out of the blackened soil of Birmingham and the Anti-Corn Law League was born in the darkened air of Manchester. The 'thirties were hardly—if at all—less hungry than the proverbially hungry decade which followed. Small wonder that as the months passed the high spirits of the Queen flagged, and not all the fatherly charm of Lord Melbourne, the excitement of going on horseback in the Windsor uniform to review her troops, or the visits of Coburg and Mensdorff cousins availed to restore her gaiety. Her early popularity was beginning to wither — even to shed a few petals — and the eye of Uncle Ernest, peering over from Hanover, perceived every sign of disintegration in the British monarchy.

The Duchess still permitted herself sometimes to admonish her child. *Oliver Twist* she regarded as frivolous reading, and at the New Year of 1839 the Queen was amusing herself with that light-hearted work. Mamma expressed regret: and she also deplored the late hours kept by Her Majesty, and the incessant round of duties and pleasures which were making her peevish and pale. Here she might well have hoped to find an ally in Sir James Clark, formerly her own Physician-in-Ordinary and now the Queen's, but he refused to concur, thereby establishing himself in the good graces of Her Majesty and sacrificing some measure of the Duchess's regard.

Clark was a Scotsman, a native of Cullen in Banffshire

but, as his name shows, a Lowlander. After taking his degree of M.A. at King's College, Aberdeen, he studied medicine in Edinburgh and in London, and served as a naval surgeon until at the end of the Napoleonic wars he was placed on half-pay. It was a curious preparation for civilian practice, especially with royal ladies as patients. Scurvy, yellow fever, venereal disease and wounds or fractures would provide him with the largest number of cases, and in an era when cleanliness was little prized and antiseptics were unknown the atmosphere in which he worked would be at once heart-hardening and horrible. It does not seem to have made him callous, but it left his native dourness unsoftened, and his natural taciturnity unchanged. In the year of the Kent marriage he escorted a consumptive patient abroad, and in 1819 he set up a practice in Rome, where he remained till 1826.

It was Clark who climbed the steep stairs of the Piazza di Spagna to attend a young English poet, Mr. Keats, dying in the care of a young English painter, Mr. Severn. That he was a kindly man is proved by his interest in this particular patient; and that he treated the disease of phthisis in the then-approved manner by a low diet and copious blood-letting is no proof that he was an unskilful physician. So highly did his medical contemporaries esteem his knowledge of that particular disease that he was chosen to contribute the article on tubercular phthisis to the *Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine*, reprinted as a separate pamphlet in 1835, the year from which his rise in royal favour began with his appointment as physician to the King of the Belgians and the Duchess of Kent.

For some reason or other Dr. Clark pleased the Duchess's daughter. Perhaps Victoria already savoured that Scottish asperity which many years later was to charm her in the shaggy person of John Brown. Certainly the part played

by Clark in the scandal which agitated the opening months of 1839 was one calculated to win her good-will rather than her mother's.

In January Lady Flora Hastings, having returned in poor health from a visit to Scotland, consulted her compatriot for what was euphemistically described as " bowel trouble ". Her figure had altered in an ambiguous manner, and her illness was " accompanied by the constitutional change usually attending pregnancy ". Clark seems to have behaved with an incomprehensible lack of discretion. Discarding his usual reticence — and the Hippocratic oath with it — he confided to Lady Portman that Lady Flora's " abdominal protuberance " had " the appearance of her being with child ". It has been pleaded on his behalf that " he was not a gynaecologist ", but if not, there was all the more reason why he should have walked delicately. For his initial error in judgement and his subsequent brusque methods he was made to suffer perhaps more than he deserved. In the view of at least one brother-medico he " bore the blame which should have fallen on others ", and the fact that he was later made a member of the senate of the University of London and a Fellow of the Royal Society suggests that in learned circles there was a desire to make amends to him for odium unjustly incurred. But these things, as well as his ultimate reconciliation with the Duchess of Kent, were still far distant when the Flora Hastings scandal burst bounds and overflowed.

That miserable story has been so often retold that it is not necessary to do more than sketch its outlines here, except where the major rôle is played by Lady Flora's royal friend. The Lady-in-Waiting had travelled up to Scotland in the same post-chaise as Sir John Conroy, and a too lively recollection of some of the foolish, indecorous jokes in the Duchess's apartments at Kensington " created ",

in Greville's words, "very easily a false impression". Rumours reached the Queen, and though she was not yet steeped in the Balmorality of her middle years, she was sufficiently headstrong and censorious to blunder into action. A movement was set on foot by the Ladies Portman and Tavistock to protect the purity of the Palace ladies from this contamination, and an appeal was made to "dear Lord M.", whose wisdom was believed to be equal to any call which his sovereign might make upon it. Alas, it was not. His constitutional loathing of rows caused him to fumble when he should have been firm. And the Queen, passing over her mother, sent Sir James Clark to interrogate her mother's Lady-in-Waiting.

The agitation of the Duchess equalled that of Lady Flora when Clark, having informed that lady that nothing but a full examination by himself and another doctor would clear her character, conveyed the same ultimatum to Her Royal Highness. "The dear, dear Duchess could not make up her mind to this", wrote Lady Hastings; but her daughter, strong in her innocence, insisted on facing the ordeal. The second medical authority, an English doctor whose name also was Clarke — with an '*e*' — won the patient's gratitude by his delicacy, and the Scot may well have seemed a little uncouth in contrast. Both signed the certificate re-establishing her reputation, but Clark had drawn upon his head the bitterest enmity of the whole Hastings clan, who never ceased to believe that he had inflicted avoidable distress upon "poor Flo".

In the meantime the facts, and some inevitable distortions of the facts, were going round. The scandal — as its victim realized with a particularly sharp pang — was being canvassed "at the Clubs". Worse still, it was engaging the attention of both Fleet Street and Grub Street. Lady Flora's family was seething with an indigna-

tion which could not fail to become vocal unless the obvious step were taken to appease it. This step the Queen would not take. She would — and did — express her deep regret; but she would not imitate her mother's example and dismiss Sir James.

If this sequence of sorry events were indeed Lehzen's revenge, she was soon punished by seeing opprobrium fall upon the Queen, who was hissed and hooted at Ascot, at the Opera, and in the streets. The conclusion that the Baroness had been at work behind the scenes seems irresistible. Nobody, not even Melbourne, had so much influence with Victoria at that time: nobody had so much reason to bear just that sort of petty, occluded malice in the Hastings-Conroy quarter.

The Duchess turned in her distress to that great rock under whose shadow so many perturbed royals had found refuge — the Duke. Had her own family not exhorted her to take no step at any time without consulting him? When she sent for him, he showed as little disposition as Melbourne had done to force things to an issue. "It is now", he remarked, in his realistic way, "between these four walls. If they were to tumble down it would be for ever buried in the ruins. So let it be." His Grace forgot that walls have ears.

On July 5 Lady Flora died, heartbroken, of the liver disease which had caused her figure to alter. By that time the whole story, "full", as Greville said, "of disgrace and evil", had been made public, and a cry of indignation had risen against the Queen and her Prime Minister. In many quarters it was believed that the 'plot' had been mainly directed against the Duchess of Kent and Conroy, and that Lady Flora had been most unscrupulously used as an instrument with which to wound them both. Lady Flora herself wrote, of "the horrible conspiracy . . . evidently got up

by Lehzen, who has found willing tools in Ladies Tavistock and Portman and Sir James Clark . . . evidently ultimately directed against the Duchess, though primarily against me". This view the Duchess took, as she said frankly in a letter to Lady Hastings: "this attack, my dear Lady Hastings, was levelled at me through your innocent child". And she added, after predicting that the Queen would some day "see and feel what she had been betrayed into", "I have stood by your child and your house as if all was my own". It was true. She had. With a generous disregard of her own difficult position, she had defied the Queen her daughter, even refusing to emerge from her own apartments for a week — a week which she spent in seclusion with the victim — and absenting herself for some time afterwards from the royal circle. "My Duchess", wrote Lady Flora, "could not have been kinder had she been my mother; she is one of the noblest of human beings."

How much it cost her may be gauged from a letter of this period in which Lady Sophia Hastings says, "I saw the poor Duchess of Kent, who is 'floored', I think. She was very kind to me, and about all of us; but she is beat down, she can fight no longer, and she will soon be completely under orders." Well might she be "floored". On June 10 Greville wrote, with satisfaction, "They have got rid of Conroy".

They had. Or rather, in the light of fuller knowledge, Mr. Greville might have written, "He had". For it was the Duke of Wellington who performed the useful and necessary office of getting rid of Conroy. In this he was materially aided by the whole Coburg family, "all the Duchess's brothers, her son, her daughter and son-in-law, all joined with the Queen and against Conroy". Whatever the Duke may have thought of Conroy as a man — though they had been on friendly terms for many years — whatever

suspicions he may have entertained as to his relations with the Duchess, his cool good sense told him that these belittling attacks on the mother of the sovereign could do nothing but harm. His Grace must surely have sighed for the comparative tranquillity of the tented field when the Coburgs in a body asked him to intervene and warn Sir John off the common sitting-room in the Duchess's apartments where he was wont "insolently to come and sit". This, said the Duke firmly, could not be. The Duchess, he pointed out, was a great Princess, independent, and having an undoubted right to select her own servants and attendants, with whom nobody could with decency interfere: "and", he reminded them, "to prohibit her officer from entering her apartments would be an outrage to her".

None the less, the introduction of Sir John's name in the Lady Flora scandal made his continued presence a little embarrassing. Anything more grotesquely unfair than the suspicion that he had been her lover cannot be conceived. He had been, wrote her own mother, "like a father in his care of her". Twenty years older than herself, and, moreover, still enjoying the friendship of the Duchess of Kent, was it likely that he would have played the fool in that way, foolish though he had been in some others? There was something repellent, too, in the very idea that he had had a *liaison* with the Lady-in-Waiting of a Princess with whom his accusers imagined him to be *au mieux*, and it looks even worse if it is supposed that he turned to Lady Flora when he realized that the favour of the Duchess could profit him nothing.

Whether the indignant Comptroller really did, as Greville supposed, incite the Duchess and her Lady to *jetter feu et flamme* seems doubtful. If so, he paid dearly for this last of many ill-advised actions. The Duke urged him in writing that if he retired from his post and went abroad for a time

his conduct would be not only gratifying to the Duchess's family but honourable to himself and appreciated by the public. After this counsel had been followed, His Grace, as he put it " gave him a *pont d'or* to retire over ", and wrote, " I cannot but think you are quite right in the course which you have taken ; and considering the sacrifices you make, and that it is liable to misrepresentation, it is an honourable and manly course ".

" Truth-lover was our English Duke ", and it would be a slur upon his memory to doubt that this was said in all sincerity.

So Sir John took his decorative person and his languishing lady abroad, and the Duchess was left without any champion but Wellington. His was a stronger arm than Conroy's, but she could not lean on it so happily.

When Sir John did in due course return to England, he settled at Arborfield, near Reading, and not on the Welsh estate which *The Times* libellously suggested " had not been bought with his own money ". The pictures hanging on the walls reflected at once his character and his career. There were many royal portraits ; there were groups of Conroy children, though no likeness of their mother ; there was a print of Kensington Palace, and one of the Battle of the Boyne. History was represented by a facsimile of Magna Charta, and mythology by a red chalk drawing of a woman cutting the wings of Cupid. In the hall hung a painting of Elizabeth Fulke, the ancestress who had been the toast of County Cork ; and from the library wall looked out the angular, animated face of Lady Flora Hastings. The plate chest contained silver " to the value of £400 ", a gift of the tradesmen who had served the Duchess of Kent during Conroy's Comptrollership.

To his honour, be it recorded, he did not die a rich man. By a settlement made in 1837 his eldest son succeeded to his

Irish estates, and in his brief holograph Will he wrote, "I leave all my other property, be it in land, houses or personals, to my wife Elizabeth" — which does not look as if theirs had been an unhappy marriage. When in April 1854 administration was granted to Sir Edward Conroy, no executor having been named and "Dame Elizabeth, relict and universal legatee", having renounced administration in favour of her son, the whole estate was sworn at only £10,000.

A Will is often a revealing document, but this, of less than a hundred words, is as reticent as it is laconic. Only the last clause has any personal colour: "I would wish to be buried in the churchyard at Arborfield, between the two services on a Sunday; and I enjoin that no expence be gone to for my funeral but what Christian decency requires" — which does not look as if the inscription on his monument, setting forth the promise of an Irish peerage, had been placed there at his desire.

After "they had got rid of Conroy" the Duchess's eclipse was total. She absented herself from Court, and lived almost in *purdah*, constantly at the pillow of the dying Lady Flora. Nobody consulted her, nobody considered her, nobody sought her out. Unwise though she herself had often been, she must have deplored the Queen's course of conduct over the question of the Ladies of the Bedchamber, and no prejudice against Melbourne was needed to make her condemn his action in cheating Peel of office in order to save Victoria from the necessity of behaving in a correct and constitutional manner. A little comfort was sometimes to be found in the society of one whose need of it was greater than her own — Princess Sophia. But this Princess had been Conroy's friend, and in consequence was *mal vue* at Windsor.

May and June were marked by visits which in normal circumstances would have given the Duchess an opportunity

to emerge. Uncle Ferdinand came over, bringing three of his attractive progeny, and Alexander Mensdorff, the dark, Spanish-looking son of Aunt Sophie, came too. Then there was the greater excitement caused by the coming of the future Alexander II of Russia, a " dear, delightful young man ", though " rather livid ". He completely eclipsed another royal visitor, the timid and unassuming Prince William of Orange, and captivated the Queen to an extent which those who desired a Coburg match must have found perturbing. Melbourne had recently reminded her that cousins were " not very good things ", that the Coburgs were not popular, and that the Russians hated them. Even though a marriage between these two reigning sovereigns would have been unthinkable, there was something unsettling in the presence of this light-hearted Muscovite, who danced the mazurka so energetically with his hostess that she was " whisked round as in a valse, which ", she added, " is very pleasant ".

The Queen's twentieth birthday must have been a melancholy day for her mother. To her, too, it brought serious reflections. She felt that she had much to be thankful for, and that she owed more to two people than she ever could repay — her dear Lehzen and her dear, excellent Lord Melbourne.

There was one other person to whom she owed much, though she would have been disinclined at that stage to acknowledge the debt. This was Wellington. Those people were far wrong who thought that " Old Arthur " was breaking up because his thick hair was getting whiter and he had " a rheumatic affection of the neck and shoulder which gave him a stiff and infirm appearance ". His brain was as clear as ever, and he was becoming increasingly conscious of the mischief arising — and likely to arise — from this estrangement between the Queen and her mother.

There must be peace, even if only a patched-up peace. Luckily he had an ally in the Duchess herself, who was beginning to find the situation intolerable, especially after the death of Lady Flora and the departure of Conroy removed two of the chief obstacles between her daughter and herself. The Speaker, Abercromby, though personally unfriendly to King Leopold and to Stockmar, had been sympathetic during the painful episodes earlier in the year, and he was called into consultation. Pourparlers were instituted. And the Queen was prevailed upon to write a very kind letter to her mother, saying that " if she had made any sacrifice out of regard for her she thanked her most warmly for what she had done ".

The Duchess laid the letter before Wellington and told him that she did not think it was in the Queen's writing. He replied that it most certainly was, and then, seeing her waver, drove home the advantage with the address of a born General. Let her return to the royal circle and adopt a conciliatory tone. What should she do if Melbourne came up to her ? Why, receive him civilly. She did not approve of the way in which he came to the Palace ? Stuff and nonsense. If he himself had been Prime Minister when Victoria came to the throne he would have taken up his abode at Kensington Palace, and when the Queen moved to Buckingham Palace he would have had an apartment there. Melbourne had done nothing but his duty.

The Duchess, knowing his opinion of Lord Melbourne, looked at Wellington with admiration. " Well," she said, " I must say you are a just man. But " — and here came the most awkward bend in the road — " but what shall I do if she asks me to shake hands with Lehzen ? " " Do ? Why, take her in your arms and kiss her." By this ambiguous answer the Duke unconsciously eased the situation. The Duchess burst out laughing at the picture thus evoked,

and he laughed with her as he explained, which was not really necessary, that by "her" he meant not Lehzen but the Queen.

The advice given to an *obbligato* of laughter was laid in all seriousness to heart. By the middle of August the Queen's mother was at Windsor again, driving down with Melbourne's charming sister, Lady Cowper, and that Lady Charlemont who had been one of the ladies entangled in the Bedchamber crisis. They had refreshments in the fishing-temple at Virginia Water and were afterwards rowed about in the royal barge. At night there was dancing in the Red Drawing-room, but the Duchess abstained, perhaps because she did not feel gay enough, perhaps because she was disconcerted by the band which, "from not being accustomed to play for dancing, made every sort of confusion". A week later either the musicians were acquitting themselves better or Her Royal Highness was in a more enterprising mood, for she actually waltzed after dinner, and took part in the Queen's favourite dancing game.

Ferdinand and his children were still in England, and Augustus, his second son, fat-faced and full of sensibility, would find a ready sympathizer in his aunt when he received news from Hungary of the death of his pet nightingale and his favourite lap-dog. Before these Coburgs departed a greater than they was in England again—Uncle Leopold himself, more austere, more instructive, more vigilant than ever. His Majesty accompanied his sister and niece to Woolwich to see their relatives off when they sailed in the steamer *Lightning* on September 11. "The poor Duchess of Kent", wrote Lady Lyttelton, "was hardly able to let go the hand of 'my brudder' — quite throat-lumpy."

About this time it seemed as if the marriage with Albert which the Duchess had so steadily and earnestly desired, might never come off. The Queen feared that too many of

her relations had visited England that summer, and did not welcome the suggestion that Ernest and Albert should come.

She had no great wish to see Albert. The whole subject, she said pettishly, " was an odious one ". Mamma, Uncle Leopold, and Stockmar were helpless. It looked as if Lehzen had either ceased to be co-operative or had lost the power to be so. Yet it was obviously time that something should be done. The more scurrilous papers were still harping upon Lord Alfred Paget, a note all the more painful to the Duchess because it was her favour which had given this irresistible family the entrée to the Palace.

The King and Queen of the Belgians had been staying at Ramsgate, but it can hardly have been in quest of sea air or sea bathing that the sovereigns of a country with such an ample coastline came to Kent. There were two things to be done. The Queen and her mother must be completely and permanently reconciled ; and Albert must be entered, paraded, and ridden past the winning-post in the race for Victoria's hand. In the event, the two things merged into one, and both were most happily accomplished, though not immediately.

Lord Melbourne had remarked to the Queen a year before that he thought King Leopold was afraid of his sister, and Her Majesty had admitted that she " feared this was the case ". On the face of it one can hardly believe that a man of such an overbearing disposition would permit himself to be afraid of any woman ; but it may be that his sister had his exact measure, and knew by what well-timed alternations of weeping and railing she could perturb him. At all events there was now no clash of purpose between them. And in October Ernest and Albert, the elder so volatile, the younger so staid, landed in England after one of those rough sea voyages that seem to be the portion of royal wooers.

A halt was made at Canterbury, where the equally grave and intelligent Charles I had been married two hundred and fifteen years before to the infinitely more attractive Henrietta Maria, and then on to London. The Coburg match was a certainty at last. There had been a chance that Victoria the Queen might change the mind made up by Victoria the Princess in 1836, and even now she was not in love, though ready to say, with Juliet, "I'll look to like, if looking liking move". Four days later that had happened which Leopold and Stockmar had willed and planned, and the Queen, now deeply in love, informed Lord Melbourne of her intention to marry her cousin.

On the evening of their arrival, tired and dishevelled, the brothers were embraced by Victoria and led by her to the presence of Mamma. On Albert's hand his aunt saw the ring she herself had given him, though not until he returned it to her soon after was she able to see that it had been "squeezed by the grasp of many a manly hand". The change in the atmosphere of the Palace was rapid and curious. "Lord M." beamed, and remarked that he had at once been struck by the resemblance between the Queen and Albert — a resemblance none the less real because it was one between a man whose good looks were always icily regular, splendidly null, and a woman whose looks were good only while aided by youth, health, and joy.

Mamma took to the saddle again, and was soon riding out with her daughter and nephews, the now reconciled Melbourne ambling near. She went with them to the morning service at St. George's, where Benjamin West's gloomy and sallow altarpiece, commissioned by George III, still jarred with the fretted canopies and the fan-tracery, and where she can hardly have sat long without remembering that in the vault beneath lay the huge coffin of Edward,

Duke of Kent, as well as the smaller one of Princess Charlotte, but for whose death she herself would have lived and died in Germany.

Three days later Victoria, her cheeks flaming and her hands shaking, proposed to Albert and was accepted. But the betrothal was to be kept secret from everyone except Uncle Ernest of Saxe-Coburg, Uncle Leopold, and Stockmar, so that it might be formally announced when Parliament met a month later.

When the Queen was editing Agnes Strickland's suppressed biography she wrote against a passage about this betrothal being "sanctioned by Her Royal Highness", "*Never.* The Dss of Kent *never* knew anything of it untill the Queen told it to her a few days before the Prince left." This seems rather hard on "the Dss". Melbourne knew, Lehzen must have known, the two uncles and the Baron were to know. If the Queen's mother was nominally excluded from the knowledge, that exclusion must have been one of the last of the many slights put upon her by her rebellious child between 1837 and 1840 — the years of eclipse. It is even possible — though hard to believe — that Victoria said nothing at all upon the subject to Mamma during those breathless days when the family party were so much together, in an atmosphere so unwontedly serene.

The Duchess, however, can have had little uncertainty as to the direction in which the wind was blowing when she watched Albert "looking so handsome" in the green Coburg uniform, riding at the Queen's side when she reviewed the Rifle Brigade in the Home Park on November 1, and settling her cape comfortably with a tender hand. The cape was needed, for it was a typical November day, and the Duchess was "in a sad worry lest the Queen should catch cold, or Lady C. Barrington be knocked up (she was

the only lady on horseback), or at least that the Riflemen *should wet their feet*".

The Prince left England on November 14, the day before the news of the engagement was communicated by the Queen to the Privy Council, and his aunt, having asked him to give her "something that he had worn", received back the ring with 'Victoria' upon it. In her excitement she bombarded him with letters, some of which followed him to their native Coburg, and the tone of his replies is significant. "I see", he wrote, "that you are in close sympathy with your nephew — your son-in-law soon to be — which gratifies me very, very much. All you say strikes me as very true, and as emanating from a heart as wise as it is kind." And, later, he wrote to thank her for her dear note, which convinced him that he was "still often in her thoughts".

Uncle Leopold was pleased: but what gave Uncle Leopold pleasure was unlikely to please the whole body of English public opinion. Dan O'Connell threw his hat into the air: but this joyful gesture only deepened the suspicions felt in many quarters as to the Protestant orthodoxy of the bridegroom-elect and his family. Old Ernest, King of Hanover, entertained the liveliest misgivings. But young Ernest of Saxe-Coburg was writing a set of verses, *Die Orangen Blüthe*, which Albert was setting to music, and Victoria was studying German, among her early exercises being a kind letter to Queen Adelaide, accompanying the gift of a bracelet containing a lock of Her Majesty's hair.

One day Adelaide was invited to go to the Palace to hear the Queen singing some of Albert's own compositions, and this recital took place in the apartments of the Duchess of Kent. But how far the Queen still was from any deep change of heart is shown by her request that her betrothed

would appoint " poor Clark " his physician. The request was granted, and in fulness of time the Duchess received Sir James into favour again. She was one of those pleasant people who find it easier going to forgive than to be implacable.

CHAPTER XI

'AUNT KENT'

. . . Nothing but heart-sorrow
And a clear life ensuing.

The Tempest, III, iii, 81

THE day after Prince Albert's arrival was a Sunday, and his future mother-in-law marked the occasion by giving him and the Queen each a copy of the Book of Common Prayer. More than twenty years later, when both her mother and her husband were dead, Victoria still cherished those books and often used them, "especially *his*". Unlike "Aunt Kent's", the Prince Consort's Lutheranism fitted easily into the Anglican framework, even though he did not escape the accusation that he was either an infidel or a Catholic. To the still active but now impotent Cumberland clique either term was interchangeable with 'Radical', and it was widely believed that the Prince shared the extreme Whiggish views of his recently annexed womenkind.

From the morning of February 10, 1840, when she went to the Queen's room before breakfast and put in her hands a nosegay of orange flowers, the Duchess of Kent vanished from the political stage never to stand again under either its crimson or its golden limelight. It was an end of intrigue and chicane, an end of recrimination, suspicion, and cleavage within the fabric of the Family. But nobody then knew, or could guess, what would in a few short years be achieved by the serious, handsome, not very robust young man at that

moment being belted and buttoned into the uniform of a British Field-Marshal.

" My dearest, kindest Lehzen gave me ", recorded the Queen, " a dear little ring." No endearing epithets are yet prefixed to Mamma's name.

It was a dingy winter morning, though later Victoria's luck asserted itself and the sky cleared. At a quarter-past twelve the strains of *God Save the Queen* from the forecourt of Buckingham Palace announced to the waiting crowd that their sovereign was setting out for St. James's Palace.

The Pagets were still much in evidence. Lord Uxbridge, as Lord Chamberlain, conducted Her Majesty from her apartments, with the Duchess of Kent walking on her other hand, and Lord Alfred Paget was among the gentlemen in attendance. Their sisters, the Ladies Adelaide and Eleanor Paget, were two of the twelve rose-crowned bridesmaids. Lord Albemarle, the Master of the Horse, did not on this occasion claim that it was his prerogative to sit in the coach with the Queen. He had made the attempt when she drove from Kensington to St. James's for her first Privy Council, only to be rebuffed by the Duke of Wellington with the reminder that the Queen " could make him go in the coach, or on the coach, or run behind the coach like a tinker's dog ". Her Majesty mentioned to " Lord M." that she would take Mamma with her on the wedding day, and he answered, " Yes, I think so, I think it would be a very right thing to do on that day ". With them was the Mistress of the Robes, the tall, decorative Duchess of Sutherland.

The Chapel Royal was gay with red velvet and glimmering with gold plate — some of it the same that had been carted down to Kew to grace the double wedding in July 1818. Four gilded chairs had been ranged before the altar, " each of different construction and varying in elevation according to the dignity of the intended occupant ". If

they had been three instead of four in number the analogy with the story of the Three Bears would have been irresistible. The Chapel soon filled up with Guelphs and Coburgs, aunts, uncles, and cousins, and the dark-green Coburg uniform mingled not unpleasingly with scarlet tunics, and Windsor uniforms, and the bright Spitalfields silks of the old Princesses. Princess Augusta was there, though she had only a few more months to live, and Princess Sophia Matilda of Gloucester, but Princess Mary, Duchess of Gloucester, destined to be the longest-lived of the sisters, was absent on account of a cold. Queen Adelaide, wearing a robe of deep purple, talked affectionately with the bridegroom while the whole brilliant, congested congregation waited for the Queen to come. At last she came, anxious, excited, very pale under the coronal of blossom. Sympathetic spectators glancing from her to her mother saw that the Duchess of Kent "seemed somewhat disconsolate and distressed".

Distressed she might well seem — good breeding and good feeling alike demanded that a wedding should be not much less tearful than a funeral — but disconsolate she had no cause to be. Had she but known it, the best years of her hitherto troubled span were about to begin.

On the twenty-first anniversary of that day the Prince Consort wrote to his mother-in-law, then, like himself, nearing the end of the road, "You have, I trust, found good and loving children in us and we have experienced nothing but love and kindness from you". From the beginning of his married life he had quietly worked for a good understanding between his wife and his "Aunt Kent", weighing in his serious way the factors which had estranged them and clearly finding much in the Duchess's character to love, much in her past to pity, and not very much in either to condemn. They liked and understood each other from the beginning, and, indeed, apart from the ties of blood, they

had many things in common, including an aversion to what she described as the London " fogues ". But blood counted for much, and Coburg called to Coburg.

It is to be hoped that the legend is now defunct which declared, in defiance of dates and facts, that the Prince Consort was not a Coburg at all. This originated in a club-room story to the effect that Melbourne had opposed the match on account of a supposed haemophylic strain in that family, withdrawing his opposition only when assured that Duke Ernest was not the father of Duchess Luise's second son. The strain is conveyed through the mother rather than through the father, and the manner in which it appeared later suggests that Queen Victoria was herself the carrier. But there are many unanswerable arguments with which to rebut the legend, and it is in any case difficult to imagine King Leopold and the Duchess of Kent desiring to see the Queen married to the child of an adulterous *liaison* on the part of their brother's wife. Melbourne's conviction that " cousins were not good things " may have been twisted into a shape undreamed of by his lordship. There were other interested persons who might have been more explicit if they had heard and believed.

The King of Hanover, for example, disliked the Coburgs in a lump, and saw no reason to except Albert from the general ban. Yet even he, with his natural disposition to believe evil, and his tongue and pen uncurbed by any gentlemanly scruples, does not seem either to have credited or repeated the scandalous story that must have been circulating in whispers even before Albert, with his unmistakeable Coburg features livid with *mal de mer*, arrived to claim his bride. Like so many other scandalous stories, it looks plausible only at long range.

" We took leave of Mamma and drove off near 4 ; I and Albert alone." So ends Victoria's chronicle of her wedding

day. "I" still comes before "Albert"; but it was not to come first always, nor even for long.

With a wisdom beyond his years Albert seems to have gone slowly in bringing the Queen and her mother together. Within a month of the marriage the question arose of finding a house for the Duchess, in which she could live alone and yet not far away. It was probably her own wish, but if Albert had not thought the step a prudent one he could have brought pressure to bear both on her and on his wife. Unfortunately, finance was involved. As the greater part of Her Royal Highness's income was ear-marked for the payment of her debts, she could not afford to pay the rent of a house appropriate to her rank, and "for particular reasons" she was loth to return to Kensington, that Palace of many memories and hopes, that scene of one irretrievable defeat.

The King of Hanover refused firmly to give up his apartments in St. James's Palace. Painful associations had no effect upon *his* tough mental fibre, and he saw no reason why he should be obliging to a woman he had always disliked, the mother of a Queen whom he regarded as something resembling a usurper, and the aunt (and mother-in-law) of an objectionable young Coburg. So the suite in which the valet Sellis had killed himself after attempting to murder his master remained empty and unattainable, and the thrifty young Queen had to hire a house for Mamma at a rental of £2000 a year.

Fourteen years earlier an enterprising contractor, Thomas Cubitt by name, had drained and laid out a dreary swamp, the property of Lord Grosvenor, popularly known as the Five Fields. The district then bore so evil a reputation that when Lord Hatherton announced his intention of moving into one of the newly-built houses his servants gave him warning in a body. 'Grosvenor Place' and

'Belgrave Square' had a sinister sound when the brick of one was red and the stucco of the other white with their pristine colours. Yet in a comparatively short time prejudice was overcome, and the ruling caste began to discover the merits both of the Place and the Square, to say nothing of their tributaries. There was a military smack about the names of many of the early tenants — Sir Henry Hardinge, General Garth, Sir George Murray, Lord Combermere, Lord Hill. Such were the neighbours, veterans of the Peninsula and Waterloo or soldiers still on the active list, whom the Queen chose for her mother when, in April 1840, she established her in Ingestre House, Belgrave Square. "She was very much affected", wrote Victoria, when the complicated removal had been accomplished, "as it is the first time she has lived alone since she has been in this country."

This was an occasion on which the Duchess could not but miss her Comptroller. New and bleak experiences were crowding upon her. Not only had she never lived alone before; she had never lived anywhere but in a castle, a palace, or a 'seat'. It is true that she was quite familiar with the interiors of modest seaside houses, with their bow-windows, narrow newel staircases, and proximity to the public highway; but these had been lodgings, not homes. She was not given much time to take root in the soil of Stucconia. Six months later Princess Augusta, her eldest surviving sister-in-law, died, and her two residences, Clarence House, St. James's, and Frogmore House, Windsor, were promptly offered by the Queen to her Mamma. So the Duke of Kent's old repeater, in its tortoiseshell case, found yet another setting.

In the interim the Duchess had been less isolated in Belgrave Square than she had latterly been at Buckingham Palace. Nearly every day she lunched or dined with her daughter and son-in-law. Sometimes in the cool summer

evenings, when the scent of the may in St. James's Park hung sweet upon the air, Victoria would call for her mother and take her for a drive, or would go with the Prince in a pony-phaeton to visit her. They were on their way when the wretched boy, Edward Oxford, fired his pistol in wild revolt against the social system as he saw it from the low tavern where he was a drudge. As soon as Albert was satisfied that the Queen was safe, and not too severely shaken, he told the postillion to drive on, and they were able to ward off the shock which "Aunt Kent" might have received if rumours had reached her first. It was an agitating moment for them all. Victoria was expecting her first child in November. Against the background of cradle and coral, bonnet and bib, she and her mother were steadily drawing closer to each other.

The London through which they drove was changing rapidly, and bore a very different face from the still patchy, picturesque capital which the Duchess had first seen twenty-two years before. A Committee of Taste, all strongly imbued with Athenian ideals, was supervising extensive reconstructions. A triumphal arch at the Piccadilly end of Constitution Hill confronted an Ionic screen at Hyde Park Corner. London Bridge had been rebuilt by Rennie and the Houses of Parliament were being rebuilt — after the fire of 1839 — according to the much-pinnacled design of Pugin and Barry. Many old shop-fronts of mellow brick or chequered half-timbering were being encased in façades of stucco, all too often with slabs of vermiculated stonework at the angles. Pall Mall was graced by the classical outline of the Athenaeum, and the Duke of York's Column towered above the majestic wings of Carlton House Terrace. When Victoria of Leiningen had come to England the Duke of York had still nine more years to live, and Carlton House ten more years to stand.

In the new buildings new men would soon appear, but in 1840 there were still many prominent figures belonging both in time and type to the old order. Hair-powder had ceased to be a profitable source of taxation; broadcloth trousers were replacing buckskin breeches and nankin pantaloons; masculine hair was getting shorter and whiskers longer; the exaggerated poke bonnet and the vast, plume-tufted hat had disappeared from the heads of womankind. Outwardly the age of steam, of railroads and paddleships and machinery, was beginning to obliterate the gayer colours and more fantastic curves of a world in which steam had hardly made its power felt. But the minds of most people over fifty were still set in an eighteenth-century mould, and a queer blend of resentment and perplexity flavoured their point of view. Every year after 1840 there were more glimpses to make them feel more forlorn.

Not so the Duchess of Kent. In spite of just over a century and a quarter under the Guelph dynasty, there had as yet been in England no such Germanization as was to follow under a Coburg Prince Consort, to the great benefit of philanthropy, philosophy, and science, and the woeful impairment of elegance and taste. When once the influence of Albert had made itself decisively felt at Windsor his aunt must have enjoyed the half-serious, half-sentimental, but wholly German atmosphere which he created there — the atmosphere of a Germany which has since vanished — or been driven — from the world alike of thought and of action. She and her nephew knew themselves for what they were — exiles and aliens by force of destiny and of duty, and this knowledge formed a bond between them that deepened as the years went past.

In the late summer of 1840 Uncle Leopold and his wife were again in England, and also Princess Feodore with her children. They were joined at Windsor by Queen Adelaide,



THE ROYAL PARTY
AT THE OPENING OF THE GREAT EXHIBITION, 1851
From the painting in the Victoria and Albert Museum

between whom and her sister-in-law amity had now been completely restored. It was all very *gemüthlich*, and in strong contrast with the atmosphere of disillusionment and suspicion which had set nerves jangling less than a year before. In November the Princess Royal was born, a lively child whose sex her parents refused to deplore in the same spirit that the Duke of Kent had refused to deplore Victoria's, though in less grandiloquent terms. With characteristic kindliness the Prince Consort dined alone with "Aunt Kent" every evening until the Queen was able to join them, and it can hardly be doubted that during these hours spent *tête-à-tête* he acquired an insight into the Duchess's character which strengthened his desire to see her and his wife at one. That he should later have placed upon King Leopold's shoulders the blame for the whole Conroy ascendancy is not without significance.

Happy though the Palace background now was, the Duchess had the wisdom not to obtrude herself upon the young people, and in May 1841 she went abroad, reaching Ostend to the music of a heavy thunderstorm. She was received everywhere — by orders of King Leopold — not with royal honours but with "civilities". At Laeken she was so well pleased with her *séjour* that she was disinclined to continue her journey to Germany, but her brother showed no anxiety to encourage this mood. "I am sure", he wrote to Victoria, "when once in Germany she will be both pleased and interested by it." And he sped her firmly on her way to their ancestral domain.

From Amorbach on June 7 she wrote a long letter to the Queen. "It is like a dream", she said, "that I am writing to you from this place. My heart is so full. I am so occupied with you and Albert and the precious little creature." The people of the principality still remembered their one-time *Regentin* with affection, and "the whole little place was in

a bustle ' to welcome her. Prince Charles had thoughtfully assigned to his mother the rooms tenanted by the Duke of Kent, but he had also arranged a " most elegant and pretty " room for her in a more modern style. Her mind went back to March 1819, when all the alterations and improvements planned by the Duke had been interrupted by their almost headlong rush back to England for her confinement. Charles had carried out his stepfather's plans for the reconstruction of the castle, even if he had not thought it necessary to continue the enlargement and re-equipment of the stables. The Duke's ghost must surely have been gratified to see that more than twenty years after his death his stepson was proving so earnest a convert to his ideas of *confort anglais*.

In the meantime the Prince Consort, accompanying the Queen on a series of visits to great English country houses, corresponded faithfully with " Aunt Kent ", and confided to her that various patches of the most pleasing English scenery reminded him of parts of Germany. The country near Panshanger, for example, he found " very like that near the Rosenau, particularly in the direction of the Fischbacher-Thal ". In July he and Victoria visited Nuneham and Woburn, and his admirable private secretary, Mr. Anson, noted carefully, " on neither occasion has the Baroness accompanied us ".

Far away in Amorbach the Duchess must have felt that God had not forgotten her. The miracle was happening. That long, subtle, relentless, pervading influence was being weakened and looked like being broken. There might soon be no Lehzen either in the foreground or behind the arras.

For the state of affairs which shortly came to pass Lehzen herself was responsible. Laurence Housman has depicted with equal skill and insight the successive stages by which the Prince eliminated her after she had had the imprudence

to try to hold her ground. How such a shrewd woman could have acted so foolishly passes comprehension. She had misread Victoria's character, Albert's character, and the whole position. She had overrated her own power, and underrated a power with which she had never yet tried conclusions — such love as the Queen was to burn like incense before Albert while he lived and before his image after his death. Perhaps she had told herself, poor, deluded Baroness, that it had always been to her interest to assert her authority without delay. She had been quickly off the mark after the accession. She had not faltered or delayed; otherwise the excitement of being a Queen might have gone to Victoria's head and made her recalcitrant. Had she not seen the good results of her conduct? Not even the charm of "dear Lord M." had shaken the young Queen's devotion to her governess, or diminished her dependence on her. "Lord M." may have drafted Her Majesty's speeches, but it was to Lehzen that she read them first, and to nobody else. It was Lehzen whose voice, reading aloud from the letters of Madame de Sévigné or the works of Racine, sounded in the royal ears while the royal hair was being brushed and braided; it was Lehzen to whom those prominent blue eyes had been raised in the Abbey with a bright glance of gratitude and affection.

In the months that followed the Baroness had seen no reason to doubt the good results of her line of conduct. Wherever the Queen had been, she had been near. When she did not walk with her on the Terrace at Windsor, she gazed down from a window; when she did not form one of the cavalcade cantering in the Great Park, she trailed it in a pony-phaeton. She had watched her old enemy, Conroy, and his family thrust into the outer darkness; she had stood by while her old enemy, Lady Flora, was humiliated and tormented. It is true that it was a bad business as

things turned out, the Lady Flora episode, but it had served to widen the breach between the Queen and her mother, and to confirm Lehzen's influence.

It had not occurred to the Baroness that the coming of Prince Albert would alter the Queen's angle of vision. Who had been a more convinced advocate of the Coburg alliance than herself? An admirable young Prince, serious, musical, philosophic, but not one likely to make trouble, or to upset existing arrangements which had always worked well — why should Lehzen fear him? Indeed, if Victoria were preoccupied with the novelty of her married life, all the less likely would she be to break away from an allegiance which had become a habit. Let the love-birds twitter, like the wax-bills in the Duchess's aviary. It soon became obvious that the male bird was to be allowed to twitter of little but love.

Lehzen may be excused for her misreading of this side of the picture. Victoria excluded Albert from her regal activities at first, while the Baroness retained her former privileged status. She might, however, have been warned by the growing friendship between the Prince and "Aunt Kent". Its growth could hardly be healthy for "Aunt Kent's" *bête noire*. Common prudence might have suggested that she should tread gently. She had always trodden quietly, but that was not quite the same thing. Now she went straight ahead with flat-footed firmness — to her Waterloo.

In the following year — 1842 — she in her turn suffered eclipse. She returned to Germany, never to revisit the country where she had been for so long a person of strange and excessive power. Sir Theodore Martin, writing under the direct supervision of Queen Victoria, said *à propos* of Lehzen's dismissal that "she should have been herself the first to desire that the offices she had hitherto filled should be transferred to the Prince". These "offices" were not

less important because they were unofficial, and chief among them was the handling of the Queen's personal correspondence. It was manifestly undesirable that anyone but the Prince Consort should have this responsibility.

The Baroness withdrew to Bückeburg, and resigned herself to an existence of cloistral solitude. In her letters to the Queen she loved to dwell on past days at Kensington Palace, reminding her adroitly of the debt which she owed her for conducting her education upon more liberal principles than had been adopted by Queen Charlotte for *her* daughters, and inferentially taking undivided credit for the inclusion of a modicum of Latin in the royal curriculum. When in 1845 Victoria and Albert visited Germany the old governess came to Friedrichsthal to see them. Only three years had passed since she said good-bye to the Queen in England. "Her old devotion", thought Victoria, "was unchanged", but she had "grown much quieter" as the natural result of her life of entire seclusion. Indeed, the poor Baroness was — as the Duchess of Kent had once been — floored. She could find little or nothing to say.

It seemed but yesterday that she had been corresponding on equal terms with Stockmar about their project for a marriage between the two happy people whom she had now come to see, and whose happiness must have been among her few consolations. Now it was clear that she belonged to a dim world of half-remembered things.

The meeting was not so successful that another was ever brought about. The Queen and the Prince revisited Germany in 1858, and as their gaudily-decorated train rattled through the station at Bückeburg they saw a diminutive figure standing on the platform waving a handkerchief. It was a torrid day. Victoria found the dust and the heat trying, and noted that the temperature in the carriage rose to 90°. The dust and the heat must have been even more

trying on the platform, and Lehzen was now seventy-five years of age. But the Queen had not requested that the royal train should halt even for a few minutes at Bückeburg. " Old Lehzen " was allowed to go silently back to her little house. She outlived the Duchess, the Prince Consort, and Sir John Conroy, dying tranquilly in 1870, and thereby drawing from her former pupil a kindly but not enthusiastic tribute to her " wonderful abnegation of self ", and to the fact that she had " never even taken one day's holiday ". An enforced holiday lasting nearly thirty years was the epilogue to her term of service. What happened to her she undoubtedly deserved, but there is something pathetic about that distant, desolate figure.

As the Duchess corresponded regularly with Mrs. Hanmer, *née* Victoire Conroy, news of Lehzen's departure must have reached Sir John. It is not difficult to imagine with what satisfaction it was received. Lady Flora's mother, having survived her daughter less than a year, did not see the arch-enemy routed. Spaeth had in the meantime returned to her post in England.

" Aunt Kent ", as Albert continued for some time to call her, showed no reluctance to frequent Claremont, although it was a place almost as intimately connected as Kensington with her second honeymoon, and her widowhood, and the Conroy chapters of her middle life. She was there a good deal in the early 1840's, when Sarah, Lady Lyttelton, found the dinners stiff, the bedrooms cold, and the atmosphere that of ditchwater. That thread of gay colour introduced by Sir John and Lady Flora was conspicuously missing from the woof of those decorous years. Then the birth of a second child (and first son) to Queen Victoria provided a brighter patch, and there was another " precious little creature " to occupy the mind of Grandmamma. Like her sister-in-law, Princess Augusta, the Duchess was by way of

being a composer of military music, and on the first birthday of the future Edward VII the band of the Grenadier Guards at Windsor played a *Pas Redouble*, later known as *The Prince of Wales's Quick Step*, specially composed by the Duchess of Kent in honour of the occasion. On his fifth birthday it was performed again — this time by the band of the Life Guards. Music remained one of her major interests, but her taste was more frivolous than that of the Prince Consort, and she liked to play selections from light operas such as *La Dame Blanche* or *Le Pré aux Clercs*, either solo or *à quatre mains* with one of her ladies. Only in the matter of reading does she seem to have made any attempt to be serious or austere. It seems improbable that she ever perused *Rose of England*; *or, The Adventures of a Prince* dedicated to her by Anna Maria Jones, authoress of *The Gipsy Mother*, *The Ruined Cottage*, and other popular works of fiction. For knick-knacks, curiosities, designs for new bonnets, and "anything funny or amusing" in the way of prints or political cartoons she had to the end of her days an insatiable appetite.

Good German though she was, the Duchess loved Paris, which she visited in the spring of 1844, travelling *incognita* as the Countess of Dublin. Here indeed were bonnets and bibelots of a beauty and variety to be found nowhere else in the world. Louis Philippe, then cultivating that English good-will which was to stand him in such good stead when only four years later his portly, respectable figure was pushed by his bored subjects off his throne, showed her every attention, though it was not a happy year in Anglo-French relations. The French annexation of Tahiti and the desire of the King that one of his sons, in defiance of the Treaty of Utrecht, should marry the young Queen Isabella of Spain, were to make it a very tricky one before it was over. But in April all was still rather artificially genial.

From Paris Her Royal Highness travelled to Switzerland to visit the Grand Duchess Constantine. After vain efforts to win back his Coburg wife Constantine had married the Polish lady for whose sake he renounced the Russian throne when his brother, Alexander I, died in 1826. "A little mad, though at bottom a good fellow," wrote Princess Lieven, who had once been his mistress. It is improbable that the Grand Duchess regretted her obduracy, for madness had obliterated goodness as the years passed, and if stories of his escapades reached Berne they must have made her shudder, 'romantic' though she was thought by her brother Leopold to be. Gaps were appearing in the Coburg ranks. The eldest brother, Albert's Papa, had died in February of the same year, causing his uncensorious relatives to shed floods of tears. It may have been his death which prompted his youngest sister to go abroad when she did, and to extend her journey to Berne. Being in mourning she could not gratify her taste for intense colours when buying bonnets in Paris, but nowhere would the accessories of bereavement, the jet necklaces set with pearls, the onyx earrings, the black velvet wristlets with gold ornaments streaked with black enamel, the filmy tuckers of white organdie, the veils of black gauze edged with crape, be so exquisite.

Two more Continental holidays were to be the portion of "Aunt Kent" before she lapsed into the slightly vegetable existence of her last decade. Between the second, in 1845, and the last, in 1850, she was ousted from Claremont in favour of the exiled Louis Philippe. Increasing affection for Frogmore must have reconciled her to the expulsion, and it was now sweet instead of bitter to be near the Queen. The grandchildren, their number augmented with almost monotonous regularity, were a perpetual solace, except when their mother's rather draconian method of nursery

discipline distressed Grandmamma. There are some descriptions of the Queen vigorously spanking her young which remind one irresistibly of Mrs. MacStinger, with the Duchess, as Florence Dombey, looking on with compassionate eyes.

The Conroys had quitted Osborne by this time, and the Queen and the Prince Consort were busy laying out the estate. The Duchess visited them there, heaven knows with what recollections of earlier visits in her mind, of the musty fly that creaked up to Norris Castle, and the handsome Conroy boys coming and going between that sham Gothic building and their father's modest farm, and Victoria still a quiet little girl with the watchful Lehzen always near. Lehzen was now far away, but another once-familiar figure was back at Osborne — the faithful figure of Spaeth, who was in attendance on her old mistress in the summer of 1849, when "the delicious baby, Princess Louise, was a delight", and Princess Helena used to bring her books and pencils to Grandmamma's room and sit there quietly drawing. To plan garments for her grandchildren was another delight. Her colour-schemes were gay, and she favoured lilies of the valley and rose-buds embroidered upon white muslin or green silk.

The dullness and the immobility of the evenings at Court have often been emphasized, the monosyllabic conversations, the turning over of the pages of *Keepsakes* and *Annuals*, the Prince's game of chess, the occasional relief of a very little very serious music, the early retirement to bed; but there were moments when cheerfulness broke in. At Osborne, for example, in 1846, they played a "horrid gambling game" called *Blind Hookey*. "What is dat name?" asked the Duchess. "I don't know", answered the Prince, "only he is Hookey and he is blind." So, relates Lady Lyttelton, "we laughed, it was said so gravely,

and quite puzzled the Duchess ".

It was certainly not in the society of his mother-in-law that the Prince Consort would find that intelligent companionship for which he hungered. None the less, he paid her the compliment of writing to her of the matters nearest his heart whenever they were separated for a time. She was abroad in 1850 when Peel died and when opposition to the Great Exhibition was rising to fantastic heights, and the Prince's letters contain allusions to both subjects. Eight years later he wrote to her from France about the " immensity " of French naval preparations and the " despicable " character of the English. " Our Ministers ", he said, " use fine phrases but they do nothing. My blood boils within me."

With every year that passed relations between the Queen and her mother improved, and the causes of disunion having vanished, the memory of them died out. They were both women who enjoyed all the homely *trivia* of life ; they both kept up a sentimental connection with Germany, especially that part of it which had had the privilege of cradling the House of Coburg. Nobody could have been more ready to indulge in *schwärmerei* over a birth, a betrothal, a wedding, than the Queen — unless it were the Queen's mother. They were also at one in their unquestioning adoration of Albert. Later, there was added another common enthusiasm. The Duchess took very kindly to Scotland.

For this last frame of mind she may have been prepared by having three successive Scottish Ladies-in-Waiting — Lady Flora Hastings, Lady Charlotte Dundas, and, after 1849, the most charming of the three, Lady Augusta Bruce, afterwards the wife of Dean Stanley. With the coming of Lady Augusta a new and mellow light seems to begin to shine upon the ageing figure of the Duchess of Kent, a light in which faces and objects are at once softened and defined.

Nothing could be more indicative of the change in the relations between the Queen and her Mamma than the ease with which Lady Augusta divided her allegiance into two equal portions and gave one to each. That is the measure of what the Prince Consort had done for " Aunt Kent ".

It was fortunate for the Duchess that this affectionate and sympathetic lady should have entered her household just at a time when one death after another was breaking the chain that held her to the past. Such a time comes in every life, especially towards the fifth and sixth decades, and it seems to bring with it a peculiar sense of forlornness, and a recurrent *nostalgie du passé* sometimes hard to endure. The Dowager Duchess of Saxe-Coburg died in 1848, to the great grief of all her surviving children. In December 1849 Queen Adelaide's death at Stanmore Priory broke another link. " Our dearly beloved Queen Adelaide," wrote Victoria to the King of the Belgians, " I loved her so dearly — Poor Mamma is very cut up by this sad event, and to her the Queen is a very great and serious loss." Patient Queen Adelaide had had her reward.

Two years later the man died who had done as much as anyone to alienate the two royal sisters from each other. Sir John Conroy departed this life in March 1851, at Arborfield, still, apparently, nursing a sense of grievance, and still taboo at Court. His wife survived him, and his eldest son had himself a son then six years old. Sir John had grounds for hope that the direct male line of the O'Mulconaires would be continued, even though his only other surviving son, Henry, was childless. He was spared the foreknowledge that the line and his own baronetcy would expire with that one Conroy grandson, though the blood of King Muiredhaigh would still flow — in the veins of Victoire's Hanmer descendants.

The spring of 1851 was an anxious period for Prince

Albert and his womankind. With every week that passed the opening date of the Great Exhibition drew nearer ; the 900,000 square feet of glass forming Mr. Joseph Paxton's giant building were gradually being fitted into their 202 miles of wooden sash-bars by an army of more than two thousand glaziers. Exhibits were pouring in and the unfortunate gentleman to whom the compiling of the Catalogue was entrusted found himself quite unable to complete it in time. Public opposition to the scheme was still strong, and some of its supporters were curiously unenthusiastic. Serious-minded persons, of whom larger numbers seemed to come into being every day, declared that it was an enterprise savouring of worldliness and vainglory, and as such unlikely to meet with the approval of Providence ; timid people, among whom in this instance the King of Hanover was ranked, thought that all the ruffians, pickpockets, assassins, and revolutionaries in Europe would flock to Kensington ; cautious people feared that it would prove a failure from the financial point of view. But the Prince went doggedly on, and his wife and his mother-in-law did for him all that admiration, sympathy, and faith can do for a man.

The opening day was fine. Mr. (so soon to be Sir) Joseph Paxton's glass palace glittered ; flags waved, fountains gushed, distinguished foreigners lent a note of exotic colour, here the *tarbush* of a Turk, there the brocade robe of a Chinaman. The importance of divine approbation had not been overlooked, and the ceremony began with a prayer by the Archbishop of Canterbury, followed by the Hallelujah chorus sung by the massed choirs of St. Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, the Chapel Royal, and St. George's Chapel, Windsor.

The crowds of gentlemen with stove-pipe hats and ladies in crinolines were duly edified, and edification merged

into excitement when the royal party appeared, the Queen " with a look of power and pride ", her face flushed, her lip quivering, the Prince in Field-Marshal's uniform, the Prince of Wales in Highland dress, the Princess Royal in pale-tinted muslin, crowned with roses. With them were the Duchess of Kent and the Duchess of Gloucester, both of whom took part in the procession which made a tour of the building before Lord Breadalbane announced from the red-covered dais that Her Majesty declared the Exhibition open.

Among the spectators was a mild-looking clerical don (some day to be a Dean and Lady Augusta's husband), Arthur Penrhyn Stanley by name, whom little or nothing escaped. As not infrequently happens upon occasions of pomp and circumstance, minor elements tended to the absurd. The frequent pauses of the Archbishop of Canterbury to look at objects of interest had, as Mr. Stanley noted with amusement, awkward results : the chaplains behind him stopped, and the Lords-in-Waiting who immediately succeeded them, walking backward, were consequently forced upon the chaplains so often " that their heels by the end of the day were quite sore with the collision ". By the time that the procession had returned to the dais " the Queen's severe look had melted into smiles " — perhaps the happiest that ever brightened her now matronly features.

It was a pleasant day for Mamma also. Nothing that contributed to the satisfaction of her daughter and son-in-law could fail to charm her, and she had in addition the type of mind to which Exhibitions make a powerful appeal. The model of the Liverpool docks, the statue of the young and beautiful Greek slave girl exposed for sale in a Turkish bazaar, the bed hangings embroidered with figures symbolizing the domestic virtues, the cream-ladle shaped like a buttercup, the porphyry table balanced by two anxious-looking bronze cranes on the tips of their bills, all would

find in Her Royal Highness an equally interested visitor. It was her fortune thus to see the inauguration of a new age, for pure Victorianism and undefiled may be said to have assumed its characteristic forms and colours — ponderous forms and violent colours — under those grey, glimmering vaults in the year 1851.

There was one person in the procession who was of the same unwearying and enquiring mind — the Duke of Wellington, a little deaf now, but still spruce, active, and elegant. The sight of him must often have reminded the Duchess of some chapter, or some page, in her life from 1818 onwards. She had met him first in that year, when her recently married second husband had taken her with him to Valenciennes. Then the slim, laconic Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies of Occupation had been above all else the Man who Crushed the Monster, and to her, whose family had suffered so much at Napoleon's hands, that was the most illustrious of all soubriquets. Afterwards, in England, she had had many dealings with the Duke, complicated sometimes by Conroy's ill-judged interventions, but harmonious in the main. "No man", says Greville, "was more respectful or deferential towards the Sovereign and other Royal personages, but at the same time he always gave them his opinion and counsels with perfect frankness." This nice balance of deference and candour commended itself increasingly to the Duchess as years passed. During her days of eclipse he had never ranged himself with her enemies; his efforts to hush up the Lady Flora scandal had been dictated by motives very different from those of "Lord M."; and he had made Conroy's departure from England easier by giving it the appearance of an honourable retreat. When her own family had tried to hector her, he had reminded them that she was a great and independent Princess and entitled to order her household as she chose. Best of

all, he had initiated that reconciliation between herself and the Queen which Albert's influence was to change from a formal to a living bond. Small wonder that when she heard how he had died, with his usual mixture of abruptness and dignity, at Walmer Castle on September 14, 1852, she was " in the greatest distress ". No one could have endorsed from ampler knowledge Tennyson's tribute,

> Great in council, great in war,
> Foremost Captain of his time,
> Rich in saving common sense.

The summer before Wellington's death had been a cheerful one for the Duchess, part of it spent in Scotland. She had been at Abergeldie in 1849, where Princess Feodore and her two small daughters had visited her, and after that an annual visit became the rule. She liked heather, conifers, cairngorms, and tartan. Neither time nor sorrow dulled her interest in fashions, and she was anxious about this time to know whether in Paris " people were wearing great magnificence of gowns, mantles, etc, and especially if they wear ribbons, feathers, flowers, and domestic utensils of all kinds on their heads ".

She was ageing in a kindly, comfortable way, summing up in herself the typical matron of Victorian England, heavily draped in body and mind but a less lugubrious being than later generations have been prone to imagine. One glimpse of her in her later years is peculiarly pleasing. At a children's ball at Buckingham Palace a young guest found her shoes pinching her so fiercely that she decided to steal into a quiet corner and kick them off. Suddenly the Duchess of Kent appeared before her and, taking in the position at a glance, said with much kindness, " That's just what happens with *my* shoes, my dear ! I always cut them a little at the top. Shall I send for a pair of scissors ? "

CHAPTER XII

THE LAST VERY HAPPY YEARS'[1]

The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new light through chinks which time hath made.
EDMUND WALLER

WHATEVER she may have felt in 1837, the Duchess was not then too old to know many happy returns. She spent twenty-two more birthdays, and after 1840 each anniversary was more definitely happy. Scotland was often their background, and that celebrated at Abergeldie in 1852 must have been one of the gayest. The whole domestic staff then gathered under her window to sing the national anthem — no longer an incongruous strain — the maids with posies in their hands, her page, Seabrook, with an Ode of his own composition in his. This he recited, when the Duchess, dressed all in white, made her appearance in the dining-room. Sprinkled with poetical *Thee*'s and *Thou*'s, the Ode ended abruptly with " Your Royal 'ighness ", and, coupled with the fact that Seabrook had garnished his prim wideawake with plumes in honour of the occasion, it must have imposed no small strain on the gracious gravity of the object.

It was all very homely, and exactly the sort of setting for the mother of Victoria as Victoria then was. The Duchess was more than commonly fortunate in her household during those last years. Spaeth was there till her own

[1] Queen Victoria.

death in 1857, very old, but loving and fatuous as ever; nobody could have been more devoted or more delightful than Lady Augusta Bruce; and a third, humbler member of the circle, Miss Wagner, formed another link with the old Coburg days, for she had been an early friend of the Duchess's, and her brother had been tutor to Charles of Leiningen. Sir John Conroy's successor as Comptroller was Sir George Couper, mildest and kindliest of valetudinarians — so mild, indeed, that it seems strange that the infant Prince Arthur, afterwards Duke of Connaught, should have wondered if he were "the Sir George who killed the Dragon".

All the old wrongs and tribulations were obliterated now. Even Sir James Clark, once an object of execration, had become a familiar figure, dour, taciturn, but kindly, and never very far away, for the Queen had lent him a house at Bagshot Park and another at Birk Hall, so that neither at Windsor nor at Balmoral would he be beyond call.

When, in the summer of 1852, Charles of Leiningen visited his mother at Abergeldie she was at pains to get some shooting for him, and in his honour crammed the house with heather, exhausting "all its crockery resources" until Lady Augusta began to fear that she might ultimately be reduced to a utensil of which modesty forbade the mention. But the Duchess was not wholly happy about her only son. His marriage had not continued to be a success, and Sir George Couper confided to Lady Augusta that even though he blamed the Prince much, he thought his wife also had "much to answer for". In this anxiety his mother could now be sure of the Queen's sympathy, and Victoria, too, had her own cares, for the Prince of Wales was failing unconscionably to fulfil her desire that he should resemble his Papa in every way, and Papa's desire that he should resemble the sons of George III in none. How good was

the understanding between Her Majesty and the Duchess appears in the words written by the Queen to King Leopold after her mother's death : " Except Albert, who I very often don't see but very little in the day, I have no *human being* except our children, and that is not the same *Verhältniss* to *open* myself to ; and, besides, a woman needs a *woman's* society and sympathy sometimes, as men do *men's* ". Little though she herself cared for such fripperies, Victoria may have found something soothing in the company of a Mamma who, at the height of the Crimean War, could send to Paris for a green silk sunshade " with a pretty handle ".

This is not to say that the Duchess took no interest in the progress of the war or in its human aspect. She shared to the full the Queen's enthusiasm for Florence Nightingale, and was pleasantly excited when one October evening in 1856 Sir James and Lady Clark brought that remarkable woman — then their guest at Birk Hall — to dine at Abergeldie. Here was another link with the remoter past, for Sidney Herbert, who had played so prominent a part in Miss Nightingale's Crimean adventure, was the grandson of that captivating Count Woronzow at whose ball the Duchess had waltzed in September 1818.

With her close-cropped dark hair, her plain black dress relieved only by the brooch designed by the Prince Consort, Miss Nightingale looked " more beautiful than ever ", and the Duchess, abandoning her card-table, sat talking to her the whole evening " without sleepiness ". During dinner there had not been much talk. The table was long, the company sparse ; Sir James, after his fashion, had sat mute ; and it is hardly surprising that shyness quenched the Duchess's intention of proposing the health of the heroine. Later her pent-up emotion brimmed over, and her conversation was punctuated with such interjections as, " It seems to me like a dream to see her there ! "

It was a singular testimony to the force of Miss Nightingale's personality that she kept her royal hostess awake all that evening, for the rhythms of the Duchess's life were slowing down. Her sight had begun to fail,[1] and she often had to devote more than an hour to each of the letters which she persisted in writing to her numerous correspondents, ranging from the King of the Belgians to Mrs. Hanmer. When ordering new pieces of music she was now careful to specify that "it must not be the small print edition", yet she continued to play the piano until the malady which about this time declared itself reached its last distressful stages. It was cancer, beginning in the left arm, and continuing, with occasional fallacious pauses, to tighten and extend its hold until it caused her death six years later.

There was another member of the Royal Family for whom the rhythms of life were slackening. This was the Prince Consort. The years which had changed him and Victoria had done their work in very different ways. She was an energetic, middle-aged woman, shrewd, kindly, strong-willed within self-imposed limits, her hard good sense chequered by soft streaks of sentimentality. It is curious that, though her whole existence was focused upon her husband, she should not have guessed how things were with him, how rapidly the machine was wearing itself out and how soon it must run down. For he had aged more than she. Her heaviness was firm, his was flabby. She was borne up in all the arduous tasks of every day by her vitality, her unflagging interest, and her sense of power. For him, with little but a dumb, dogged sense of duty to keep him going, the road can have been nothing but grey.

As the children grew up, his burden became heavier. His eldest son did not resemble the ideal jointly evolved

[1] In 1839 she was already using Grimstone's Eye-Snuff, also patronized, according to the advertisement, by "His Late Majesty," and "authorised by the Lords of the Treasury".

by Stockmar and himself. The Princess Royal, in whose intelligence his own tired brain had found so delightful a stimulus, was taken from him at seventeen to marry the golden-bearded Crown Prince of Prussia. At the wedding Grandmamma, "looking so handsome" in white silk and violet velvet trimmed with ermine, sat in the gallery with the Duchess of Cambridge and mingled her tears with hers, while Princess Alice and the younger royal children sobbed aloud. Even in those days of mournful sensibility there can have been few bridals so lachrymose as that of the future father and mother of Wilhelm II. As for the Duchess of Kent, she was to be not only the Kaiser's great-grandmother but the not-very-far-removed ancestress of his children through her granddaughter, Princess Ada of Hohenlohe, the mother of the Kaiserin.

The Queen, however, seems to have borne with comparative fortitude this early separation from a daughter to whom she never drew very near in spirit until after sorrow had sealed them both as its own. She stressed the Princess's grief at leaving her father rather than his at losing her. If the cynics were right who thought that she was a little jealous in that quarter, her own mother, "always so dear, so kind", may have seen further. Well, wrote Lady Augusta, the Duchess "knew his heart — better than others" and she would understand what the loss of that companionship cost him. That he was able to enjoy the society of his next daughter, Princess Alice, for the remainder of his days was only because those days were so few. Queen Victoria seldom showed any desire to keep the young hen-birds long in the nest.

When the Duchess returned to Frogmore in the autumn of 1856 it became clear that her malady was gaining ground. The faithful Miss Wagner was anxious that she should consult an American specialist of the unpromising name of

Dr. Fell, but the suggestion was vetoed by Dr. Brown of Windsor, whom Lady Augusta called "a nasty little snob" for his pedantic scruples. Indeed, in the existing state of medical and surgical science there was little that anyone could do. A severe set-back followed the almost sudden death of Prince Charles of Leiningen, after three paralytic seizures, in November, when poor old Spaeth "seemed to recover her former prudence and self-possession", and took to Sir George Couper instead of straight to the Duchess the letter addressed to her by the Prince's gentleman with the news of his grave plight. In the last letter he had written to his mother the Prince had complained of the "cold and solitude" of the house at Wald Leiningen, and it was there that he died — a sad end for one who, with all his errors, was much loved by his own people.

Sir George Couper valiantly offered to go to the funeral if Sir James Clark would go too, "to take care of him", but in the event this ordeal was not imposed upon the two veterans, and Prince Edward of Saxe-Weimar represented the whole Family. Nobody could have been kinder than the Queen, and in spite of her distress the Duchess made such efforts to be brave that her admiring granddaughter, Princess Helena, described her as "wonderful, QUITE WONDERFUL".

The next figure to vanish from the scene was that of Baroness Spaeth, the "blessed, blessed Baroness" as Lady Augusta called her — and indeed Spaeth was in herself an illustration of the truth of the fifth Beatitude, "blessed are the meek". Her death left a gap which even Lady Augusta could not fill, for she had grown old with the Duchess, and was one of the very few remaining people to whom she could speak about the early days at Amorbach, and the childhood of Charles and Feodore, the coming of the Duke of Kent, the dark days at Sidmouth, the happy days at

Kensington before Lehzen on one side and Conroy on the other created a double disharmony. One of the saddest penalties of age — as Queen Victoria was to feel — is the gradual disappearance of those friends to whom one can say, " Do you remember ? "

Before the year 1857 ended there was another death in the Coburg ranks. On November 10 the Duchesse de Nemours, the daughter of Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg and Toni de Kohàry, died at Claremont thirteen days after the birth of the " dear little pink infant " which Queen Victoria described sleeping in the next room to that in which the young mother lay dead " with her splendid hair covering her shoulders ". Saplings fell when old, stricken trees still stood.

The Duchess of Kent indulged in no self-deception about her illness, but a year later, in spite of severe pain over the left eye, she was still reading and writing industriously, begging to be allowed to give Lady Frances Bruce " a *certain dress* " for a " *particular occasion* " (her marriage to Evan Baillie of Dochfour), and expecting to arouse astonishment by the avowal that she was reading the *Daily News*, which contained " some very good articles about poor Lord Raglan ".

There was a family reunion at Osborne for the Queen's birthday in 1859, and the Duchess was actually packing up to come and join them when she became suddenly and alarmingly ill with erysipelas. The Queen was, in her own words, " thoroughly shaken and upset ". She had never envisaged the truth which had been apparent to those about her mother long before, and no one had been cruel — or courageous — enough to undeceive her. " I hardly myself knew how much I loved her ", she wrote to Uncle Leopold, " or how my whole existence was bound up in her, till I saw looming in the distance the fearful possibility of what I will

not mention." The distance was not very great — less than two years away — and during those two years it was, as the Prince Consort wrote to Stockmar, the Queen's " constant care and occupation . . . to keep watch over her mother's comfort ". The Prince added, no doubt with truth, that the influence of this upon her character had been " most salutary ".

So few incidents broke the last quiet stretch of road that to trace its course is like turning the pages of a mid-Victorian scrapbook — here a view of the Jungfrau, of the Fischbacherthal, of the Firth of Forth, there a design for papier-mâché work or wax fruit, or a pattern to be embroidered in Berlin wool. A lithograph from a music-cover would succeed an engraving from a picture by that talented artist Mr. W. P. Firth, and there would be no lack of gay little flower-pieces, posies of streaky tulips, tight little double dahlias, and languid convolvuli.

Then there would be many pleasing sketches of the royal children : Princess Alice sitting at the piano, Princess Beatrice in a black velvet frock, Prince Arthur in a kilt with a prodigious walking-stick in his hand, the Prince of Wales contemplating the Niagara Falls. At intervals a black-edged *faire-part* marks the death of yet another relative or friend.

In April 1860 died Feodore's husband, Prince Ernest of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, " poor, dear, honest Ernest ", and grief was complicated by anxiety about his eldest son, Prince Charles, and his youngest, Prince Victor, one of whom it had been found necessary to depose from his place at the head of the family and pension off, while the other persisted in his resolution to marry a portionless daughter of the house of Seymour. The second son, Hermann, who replaced Charles, was charming to his widowed mother, but some malign fate seemed to decree that the first-born sons of the Coburg line should be in one way or another the

reverse of satisfactory. " There is no one like her ", wrote Lady Augusta of the Duchess ; " she knows and guesses everything by that tender heart of hers ", and no one would know better what her elder daughter was enduring at that time.

Her own powers of endurance were now severely taxed, though the Queen, sanguine to the last, wrote of her as " wonderfully well ", and astonishing Princess Clémentine by her looks in the spring of 1860. As the year advanced, there was a pleasing development to distract her thoughts from the steadily extending pain in her arm, shoulder, and neck — the romance between Prince Louis of Hesse, " *so* loveable, so very *young* ", and Princess Alice, the Princess upon whose face an unearthly radiance seemed already to fall.

The Duchess spent the last summer of her life at Cramond, in a house looking out over the Firth of Forth, " but well sheltered by fine trees ". There she was visited by the Queen and the Prince Consort, who made a halt at Holyrood on their way to Balmoral. With a final flicker of her old vitality she was able to sit for three hours in the open carriage beside Her Majesty while the Scottish Volunteers manœuvred against the impressive background of Arthur's Seat. Neither the hot, dusty weather nor the circumstance that the people were " very noisy and demonstrative in their loyalty " seems to have been too much for her. A week later her sister the Grand Duchess Constantine died at Berne, thereby casting over her birthday a shadow which was only imperfectly dissipated by the presence of Victor Hohenlohe and Ernest and Marie Leiningen.

In his affectionate birthday letter the Prince Consort referred sympathetically to her loss, lamented that he and the Queen should so often be separated from her on that anniversary, and asked her to picture to her thoughts the

improvements and renovations which awaited her at Frogmore. But her first distress was too great for any formal celebrations, and Dr. Brown informed Victoria that he thought the death of the Grand Duchess had done the Duchess " decided harm ". Not until September 9 was it felt that any festivities would be possible, and they then took the form of a garden fête at which school children were abundantly stuffed with tea and buns, and Highlanders who had survived the siege of Lucknow piped and danced on the lawn. In October the Duchess returned to Frogmore, breaking the return journey to stay at Archerfield with Mr. and Lady Mary Nisbet Hamilton. She was still well enough to delight in the Bass Rock, shining " like a mass of silver in the sunshine ", and to be " quite taken up " with the life-history of the teeming geese upon it. When the Prince of Wales returned from Canada in November she anxiously asked if there had been " any incipient attempt at flirting ", to be reassured by General Bruce that the Prince had " delighted to dance with all his 1000 partners, and had made no distinctions ". But she was no longer able to go up from Frogmore to the Castle, and her daily drives were continued only at the cost of increasing strain.

All through November, December, and January she was solaced by the company of Princess Alice, who came down from the Castle almost every evening to play to her — or even to play with her, for with failing sight and a badly crippled arm she still would not abandon her piano.

In February 1861 there seems to have been one of those illusory returns of energy which interrupt even the most hopeless maladies, and the Duchess spent a few days at Buckingham Palace, not too ill to appear at luncheon and at dinner, to enjoy short drives, to go and sit for her photograph. One of her last drives was through the recently laid-out Park at Battersea, a place which only a few years

before had been a squalid wilderness haunted by the toughest of men — and dogs. At that season " the pavilions devoted to the cricket-playing fraternity " were deserted, but in the Tropical Garden there were outlandish plants " with prickles standing up in an angry and porcupine manner all over the leaves ", and the lake was already the haunt of a greater variety of waterfowl even than the Bass Rock. She returned to Frogmore on February 26, when the Queen and the Prince Consort departed for a short visit to Osborne, and two days later her faithful friend and servant, Sir George Couper, died. " I trust ", wrote the Prince, " that this loss may not take hold of you too strongly " ; and three days later he assured Stockmar that " though Mamma's health has not been injured by the shock, she feels the loss deeply, and will feel it more as time goes on ".

It was the amiable desire of both the Queen and himself that when they came back from the Isle of Wight Mamma should rejoin them at the Palace instead of going to Clarence House. " With our children about her ", wrote the Prince, " she will have more to amuse her." She was still amusable, and astonished her ladies on the evening of her return to Frogmore by unpacking with her own hands all her writing-table treasures, which had performed the journey in nests of silver paper. She had laid aside her mourning, and was cheerful enough to laugh at her page, Turpin, who was a privileged jester. Nor did she omit to have the Duke of Kent's big old repeater brought to her to be wound up.

Now, tardily, essay was made of what surgery could do to relieve her, and on March 6 Mr. Lawrence came from London and lanced a painful abscess on her wrist. She was still talking of going to London on the 11th — then the 12th — then the 13th — even though her arm was completely immobile. And still every morning she dictated her journal to Lady Augusta and caused her to find the text for



THE DUCHESS OF KENT IN LATER LIFE
From the portrait by Winterhalter
in the National Portrait Gallery

the day in her German Meditation Book. That for the day of Sir George Couper's funeral was Luke xxii, 43, and the Duchess, perhaps with a momentary forgetfulness of the person to whom the words were first addressed, was much struck by its appropriateness.

On March 12 the Queen and the Prince visited her, and the next day she received the widowed Lady Couper, moving from her sitting-room into her bedroom for the purpose, "so as not to remind her of the winter evenings", when Sir George had been so often there. Always fastidious, she insisted on being dressed and made fresh and elegant with spotless caps and shawls even when the exertion of turning round in bed was painful. With what uncomplaining fortitude she endured the many distresses of these last days those about her bore willing witness, and it may be that her courage helped to create in the Queen that blind optimism which was followed by so shattering a reaction when the end came.

On the 15th the Queen and the Prince went to inspect the Horticultural Society's new gardens at South Kensington, laid out on some twenty acres of land now covered in part by the Natural History Museum and its grounds. The whole district had been given a new character as the result of the Great Exhibition of 1851; museums, conservatories, mansions, and parterres were rising as if by magic from the soil hitherto devoted mainly to market gardens and unassuming squares and terraces. Colonnades adapted from those at the Villa Albani, cloisters derived — more or less — from those of St. John Lateran, astonished the admiring visitor. Here, obviously, Committees had been at work, and here they were at work still, many of them under the chairmanship and all of them under the patronage of the Prince Consort.

On this particular day the Queen returned from the

Horticultural Society alone, leaving her husband to transact business with that particular Committee. The Duchess had been bright that morning, and a favourable bulletin had been issued. So completely reassured was Sir James Clark that he went up to London with no intention of calling on his way back to Bagshot had it not been that Lady Augusta Bruce and Lady Mary Howard were to drive him over from Frogmore.

When he reached the house at 3 P.M. he found the Duchess sitting propped up on the sofa, fully dressed even to her crinoline, not unconscious though very weak, and shivering violently from time to time. Without a moment's delay he hurried back to London, to South Kensington, where he sought out the Prince with the intelligence that Her Royal Highness was dying. Together they drove to Buckingham Palace, and at 6 P.M., as the Queen sat " resting quite happily in her arm chair ", she was startled by the sudden entrance of her husband telling her to prepare to go to Frogmore at once.

The journey was made by train, and Princess Alice went with them. By the time that they arrived the Duchess's ladies had with difficulty removed her crinoline, substituted a silk dressing-gown for her dress, and a nightcap for the lace scarf which she usually wore over her dark hair still only streaked with grey. Trembling the Queen entered the closely-curtained room, knelt down beside her and kissed her hand, and laid it against her cheek. But there was no recognition, only a strange, questing anxiety in the eyes which the dying Duchess opened, and she brushed aside the hand that held her own. " For the first time ", wrote the Queen afterwards, " she did not know the child she had ever received with such tender smiles."

The Prince, with his wonted insight and efficiency, saw that the Duchess was uncomfortably placed. No one had

been "very clever" about it, and the doctors, Sir James and Brown, were afraid to have her moved. Towards evening he prevailed upon them to allow her to be lifted, with the aid of a shawl and supported by his own arm, into a less awkward position.

Various rooms had hastily been made ready, so that the Queen, her husband, and children could spend the night at Frogmore, and Her Majesty was persuaded to withdraw with her maid, Weiss, to the apartment known as "the scarlet fever room", where she lay down for a little while on a sofa at the foot of the bed. She had promised to try to rest until summoned back, but three times she crept down in a white dressing-gown with a little lamp in her hand, to kneel again beside the oblivious figure, whispering "Mamma" as if the sound must rouse her.

It has perhaps been insufficiently realized that under the pressure of emotion Queen Victoria's commonly diffuse and ejaculatory style sometimes condensed itself into passages of real literary beauty. In her account of her mother's death, for example, she wrote:

> As the night wore on . . . I heard each hour strike, the cocks crow, the dogs barking in the distance. Every sound seemed to strike into one's inmost soul. . . . All still. Nothing to be heard but the heavy breathing and the striking at every quarter of the old repeater, a large watch in a tortoiseshell case which had belonged to my poor father, the sound of which brought back all the recollections of my childhood, for I always used to hear it at night, but had not heard it now for twenty-three years.

Other objects in the room belonged to the old Kensington days, or even to the even more distant days at Amorbach, and there were many of them which the Queen had not seen since her accession. Herself a passionate accumulator, it was not until after her mother's death that she made acquaintance with her vast, complicated collection

of relics, some of them associated with Princess Charlotte, some with the Duke of Kent, some no more substantial than locks of hair and withered flowers.

The Prince prevailed upon the Queen to withdraw while the dressings were changed on the patient's wounds, one in the wrist and another in the side — neither had healed up. When she returned she found the window and both doors wide open, and Lady Augusta giving the Duchess sips of wine and water from a spoon. As she seated herself on a footstool and possessed herself of the unbandaged right hand, Victoria saw that her mother's features were growing longer and sharper, though a touch of the wonted colour lingered on the cheeks; and presently she felt that the hand within her own, though still warm and soft, was getting heavier.

About nine o'clock Lady Augusta laid down the teaspoon, as swallowing had become too difficult. The breathing grew slower and fainter. Now they were all kneeling round the bed, the Queen, the Prince, Princess Alice, the Duchess's ladies, "poor, good old Clark", watching the quiet face with the fast-closed eyes and waiting for the last throb of the slackening pulse. The Duke's repeater struck half-past nine.

It was the Prince who, himself shaken by unaccustomed sobs, realized that death had come, and, lifting the weeping Queen in his arms, half-carried her from the room.

On the third anniversary of that day Princess Alice wrote from Germany to her mother, "Do you recollect when all was over and dear Papa led you to the sofa in the Colonnade and then *took me to you*? I took that as a sacred request from him to love, comfort and cherish my darling mother to all the extent of my weak powers." But no love — not even her husband's — could help Victoria. "My childhood, everything, seemed to crowd upon me at once. I

seemed to have lived through a life, to have become old." With her characteristic amalgam of sentiment and good sense the Queen in those words went to the root of the matter. It was that resurgence of her childhood which lent to her new grief its most bitter smart. During the last tranquil years so many things had been forgotten, so much had been blurred by love and forgiveness and understanding; but now the past awoke to life with merciless clarity, and it was impossible to forget.

"Oh," she wrote to King Leopold, "I am so wretched to think *how, for a time, two people* most wickedly estranged us. . . . To miss a mother's friendship, not to be able to have her to confide in, when a girl *most* needs it, was fearful! I *dare not* think of it — it drives me *wild* now." She does not explicitly accept any share of the blame, but it is obvious that remorse had taken hold upon her. "Thank God", she exclaimed, "that is all passed *long, long* ago, and she had forgotten it, and only thought of the last very happy years." And once more her sense of justice asserts itself as she adds, "And all that was brought about by my good angel, dearest Albert, whom *she* adored, and in whom she had such unbounded confidence".

The tact and tenderness of the Prince during these first days of bereavement have been rightly praised, but, after his fashion, he blended firmness with them. According to Mr. Disraeli, "he lectured the Queen severely on giving way so completely and told her to remember that the blow was dealt by the All-Wise". However dutifully this reminder was received, it cannot have availed much while Victoria was in the throes of self-reproach. "Oh," she cried to Lady Augusta, "if only I could have been with her these last weeks! How I grudge every hour I did not spend with her!" The reflection that her presence might have tired the Duchess stemmed only for a moment the flood of her

regrets, and it broke bounds again when she returned to the death-chamber and saw her mother lying on the sofa in her white dressing-gown and cap, quite unchanged, with a smile upon her lips.

Meanwhile the inevitable pageant of royal death was in active preparation. A black carpet was spread in the drawing-room at Frogmore, black curtains were hung upon the windows and doors, and black chairs had been ranged at the end of the room farthest from the coffin. But for the concealing pall, relieved only by the sober gleam of armorial bearings, the coffin itself would have broken the general gloom, for it was covered with crimson Genoa velvet, studded with gilt nails, and furnished with eight massive silver-gilt handles, each bearing a Princess's coronet. At the head, on a black-velvet cushion, was her actual coronet, flanked by palms and wreaths, and the pall was strewn with posies of white and purple flowers. The Queen, always observant of detail, felt — as most bereaved people feel — the contrast between the trappings of death and " the dumb souvenirs which so painfully survive what was so dearly and passionately loved ". Here there was the chill, the gloom, the finality of bereavement; in the Duchess's sitting-room " all was unchanged — chairs, cushions, everything — all on the tables — her very work basket with her work — the little canary-bird which she was so fond of — singing ".

On Sunday, March 24, the Dean of Windsor preached in the private chapel of the Castle a sermon later printed for private circulation by royal command. It was a better production than the funeral orations pronounced — in prose and verse — upon the Duke of Kent forty-one years before, though the ghost of Dr. Collyer seems not far off when the circumstance is mentioned that it was the Duchess's " strict charge that communicants of all ranks should kneel

by her side", and that she did not "draw near the Holy Table alone, as though she had some special privilege". There is an interesting point in the Dean's tribute to her lack of ostentation, for he remarks that throughout the whole of "*her later life*" the homage due to her station seemed to be painful to her. Upon the following day the coffin was to be deposited in the vault beneath the choir of St. George's, until the Mausoleum at Frogmore should be completed, and the preacher had that ultimate resting-place in his mind when he said, "this sepulchre is in accordance with this retired life of simple greatness", and exclaimed, "Whatever henceforth be the genius of this soil, be it sorrow or joy, or blended scenes of both, preside, oh, gentle spirit, whose earthly part shall be a tabernacle there, preside over it with thy kindliness, simplicity and love!"

Before daybreak on Monday, March 25, the coffin was removed privately from Frogmore House to a temporary ante-chapel, lined with black cloth, at the north-west corner of the nave of St. George's. The pall was of unusual size, "in order to conceal the attendants who wheeled the bier". Until eleven o'clock, when the committal service was read, the dead Duchess lay in state at the foot of Princess Charlotte's monument. The pale flicker of the candles illuminated the sculptured group in which the Princess's soul is seen soaring happily upward, admired by two angels, one of whom clasps the little dead prince in her arms, while below three heavily draped figures lament beside a shrouded form of which only the finger-tips of the right hand are visible.

There had been no need for Leopold to make to his youngest sister the appeal he once made to Queen Victoria, "Grant always to that good and generous Charlotte, who sleeps already with her beautiful little boy so long where all will go to, an affectionate remembrance, and believe me she

deserves it". The Duchess had always granted an affectionate remembrance to the sister-in-law whom she never saw in life, and now death had drawn their dust together.

The Address of Condolence was moved in the Commons by Palmerston on behalf of the Government, and seconded by Disraeli on behalf of the Opposition. Neither statesman was then in great favour at Court, though the reasons for their unpopularity were different. As might have been expected, the younger man did not let pass this opportunity to descant in his floweriest manner upon so rewarding a theme. "In the history of our reigning House," he reminded Honourable Members, "none were ever placed as the widowed Princess and her Royal Child. Never before devolved upon a delicate Sex a more august or more awful Responsibility"; and he added, in the course of a characteristic peroration, "it is generally supposed that the Anguish of Affection is scarcely compatible with the Pomp of Power, but that is not so in the present instance".

The press, a more sober if not a less mighty organ than it had been in the hands of the Potts and the Slurks, was full of highly correct sentiments, and there was an obvious disposition to give to the Queen's mother a great deal of the credit which would more justly have been given to her husband. One leading article declared:

> For our wives' and daughters' sakes we have reason to be thankful that profligacy finds no countenance in the Court, and that purity of heart is exposed to none of the shocks which it is so often fated to sustain when vice walks unabashed in the highest places of society. It has been otherwise in the recollection even of those now living. . . . There have been times when the domestic virtues were not invigorated by the sanction of the sovereign, and when the atmosphere in which they lived was tainted by a miasma which descended from the most elevated region.

Yet the Duchess undeniably deserved some part at least

of this gratitude, for she *had* valued and practised the domestic virtues, and she had chosen as the guardian of her child's early years a woman who, with all her grave faults of character, was as austere a moralist as even Prince Albert could have desired. It cannot be claimed for her that by any unusual quality of mind she set her mark either upon Victoria or upon the Victorian Age. By alienating her daughter during her most impressionable years she threw away her only chance of influencing her when the new reign began. She chose her own confidants and counsellors without judgement and listened to their counsels without wisdom : only Wellington, who was imposed upon her by circumstances, had any power to guide her aright. Though often " afraid where no fear was ", she would as often range herself with audacity against the lawful might of the throne. Yet she bore her defeat with dignity and without complaint, rancour had no part in her, and magnanimity was one of her nobler virtues — a virtue which brought even more than its wonted great rewards.

By making her son-in-law the sole executor of her Will the Duchess unwittingly added to the burden beneath which he was already sinking fast. The death of her Comptroller only a fortnight before her own complicated the Prince's task, for though the bulk of her property went to the Queen, and though her myriad personal belongings were in exquisite order, it was necessary that the mementoes she had bequeathed to relatives and friends should be identified and despatched, and there were various duties connected with the administration of the estate. He himself was deeply moved by the loss of this aunt whose tenderness had filled a blank left in his earlier life by the desertion of his own mother, and there can be little doubt that he deliberately used her death as a means of preparing the Queen for his own.

He "had always talked of the shortness of life", and said that there was "no rest or real joy in this world"; he was willing as well as ready to depart when the call came. Sure that it must come soon, he set himself to store his wife's mind with counsels and precepts which might uphold and guide her when he would no longer be at her side. The passionate abandon of her sorrow for her mother had shown what havoc a greater sorrow might wreak upon her mind and her body, and he made it a text from which to preach the bleak virtues of resignation, fortitude, and self-control. After his own death only nine months later she tried, poor stricken Queen, to put his precepts into practice. "Now, you see," she said to those about her, "I am calm. I am profiting by his advice. I am doing what he wished." But it may be doubted whether this artificial calmness helped her much.

A true child of her age, Victoria savoured anniversaries, even the most sad. On August 15, 1861, she thought much of poor dear Aunt Julia; "*that loss*", she wrote, "was the *signal* for my irreparable one". Next day she went to Frogmore, with the Prince, Princess Alice, and Lady Augusta, "*All* looked like life, and yet *she* was not there". They spent the night in the "dear, pretty house", and the next morning, after breakfast, they went, bearing wreaths, to the Mausoleum, where the coffin of the Duchess had now been laid in "a splendid granite sarcophagus". In describing this mournful visit to Uncle Leopold the Queen used words which it seems impossible that she would have written if there had remained in her mind the most dim suspicion of her mother's honour and virtue. "The pure, tender, loving spirit", she wrote, "*which loved us* so tenderly, is above us — loving us, praying for us, and *free* from all suffering."

When in due course a monument was erected, the figure

upon it was not reminiscent of the Duchess as her daughter had last seen her, recumbent, with closed eyes. Her carven image stands erect, a lace cap on her head, a lace shawl round her shoulders, pearls at her throat, bows of ribbon on her flounced dress. Over her is a ceiling of royal blue, about her are walls of crimson. She shares with no one the little mausoleum approached by a flight of steps and veiled outside in summer-time with a woof of purple clematis, but not far away Victoria and Albert lie tranquilly in their marble sleep.

On August 26, 1861, Her Majesty was in Ireland, thinking "*so* much of dearest Mamma". With excess of loyalty, one of the regimental bands at a review played a march composed by the Duchess, which upset the Queen entirely. Among the things she missed most was writing to her mother "and telling her everything"; they had exchanged letters every day, sometimes more than one, even when they were seeing each other frequently. Times had indeed altered since a petulant young sovereign had complained to her Prime Minister that everything she said to Mamma was at once repeated to Mamma's Comptroller. Much more than the disappearance of that Comptroller was needed to change an atmosphere so charged with hostility and distrust.

"When one looks back on those times," wrote King Leopold, "one must say that they were full of difficulties." Whatever trials lay ahead of the Queen in 1861 — and they were neither light nor few — she was never again to pass through the Valley of Humiliation which she had trodden from her tenth to her eighteenth year. Tribute has been paid to her Mamma's magnanimity after the Prince Consort had reconciled them, but to her also honour is due, for the "two people", Conroy and Lehzen, who (from very different motives) had estranged them had incidentally poisoned the springs of Victoria's youth. It was sad enough to have

missed " a mother's friendship ", but it was worse still to have spent those eight years, night and day, in the presence of a mother for whom she felt neither affection nor respect. Even the removal of Conroy had availed little ; even the departure of Lehzen was not enough. Well might she call her " good angel " the husband who had ended all this bitterness for ever.

It was further evidence of the depth of the Queen's belated affection for " dear Mamma " that even in retrospect she hated to admit that the Duchess's health had long been failing. Preposterously she wrote to King Leopold in August 1861, " last year she was still so well, and so full of life ". Even more preposterously she wrote on November 26 of the same year that Albert was " *unberufen* . . . much better this winter than he was the preceding years ". " Good old Clark " and " good Brown " were not the men to undeceive her. It is true that after the death of the Duchess the Prince had spoken in boding tones of his own ; but then he was worried, overworked, out of sorts, and, as King Leopold knew, he was " always *so* depressed when there was anything the matter with him ". On December 9, enclosing Clark's report, the Queen wrote " every day is bringing us nearer the end of this tiresome illness, which is much what I had at Ramsgate, only I was much worse and not at first well attended to ". Five days later it was the arduous life of the Prince Consort which ended. This time the loss was indeed irreparable, and the Queen was in good truth alone.

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